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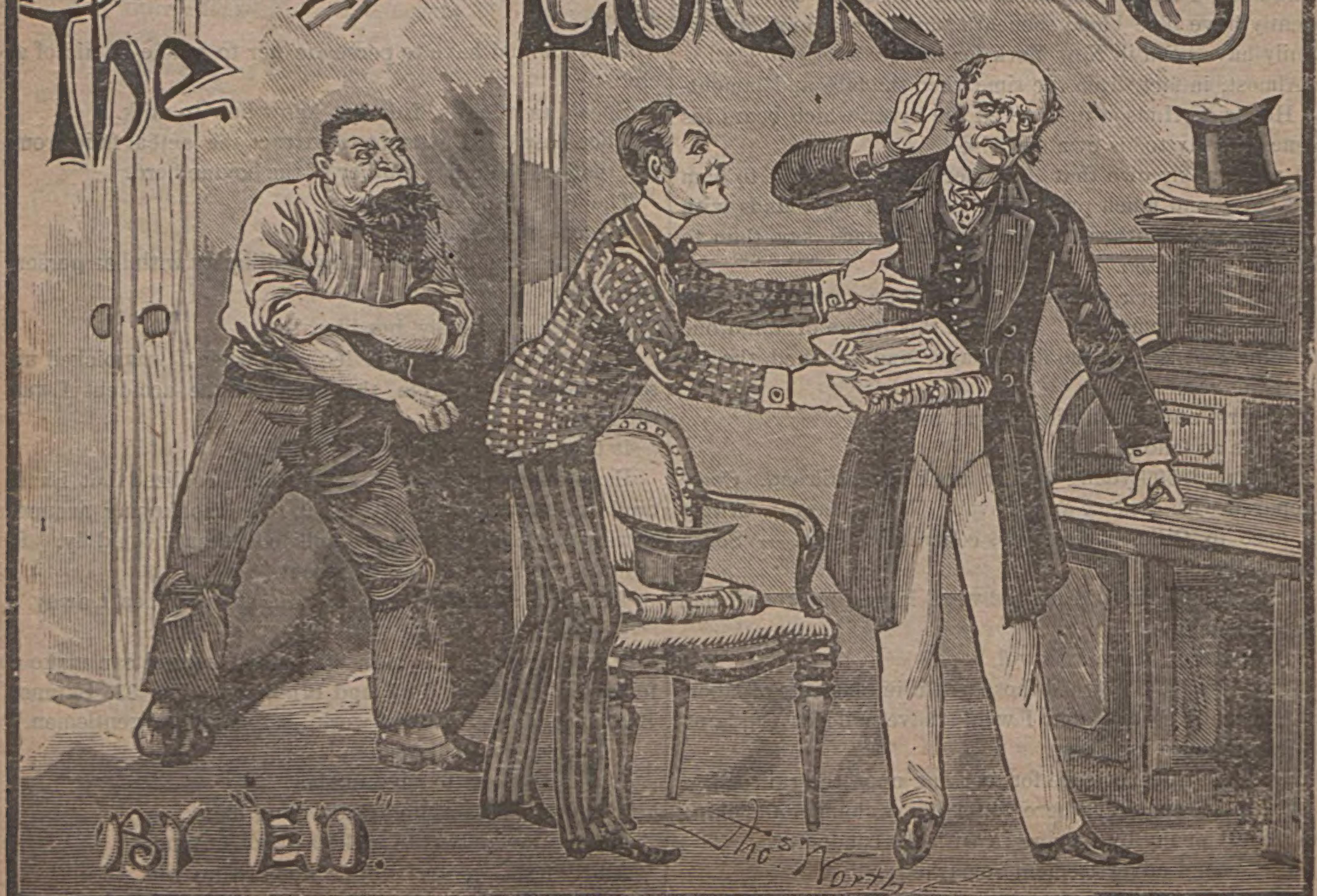
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Vol. I

The Books Agents LUCK



BY ED.

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THE BOOK AGENT'S LUCK.

By "ED."

CHAPTER I.

MANY people may have an idea that the literary work that I astound the readers of THE BOYS OF NEW YORK with weekly yields me a small fortune per annum.

If such is the hallucination that they labor under I beg that they will please dismiss it from their minds.

I do not confidentially get over three thousand dollars a year, and that is a small stipend for one of my fastidious tastes.

You see, I am of Knickerbocker descent, and consequently have blue blood beneath my finger nails, for our family have been in New York for hundreds of years.

Almost, in fact, from the time when the late and lamented Hendrick Hudson discovered the river which bears his name, greatly to his own surprise.

I will frankly own that I prefer quail on toast to ham and eggs, and much prefer to wash down my viands with "champag-ne wather," as our Irish friends say, than to drink plain Croton.

So a little over a month ago I made up my mind to add to my income somehow. While in this frame of mind one morning I picked up the day's paper and scanned the advertising columns.

The first one I read did not suit me.

It was as follows:

"Wanted, 500 young men to work on a railroad. Come prepared with pick-ax and shovel. Wages large. Apply at once to O'Brien Brothers, contractors, No. — South street, city."

True, it said that the wages were large, but then I had no pick-ax.

Neither did I have a shovel.

And, even had I owned those useful implements of labor, I am morally certain that I would have had not the faintest idea how to use them.

Besides, I did not care for working upon the railroad.

Except as spotter, where you stand a chance of making an honest penny by ringing in with the conductor.

The second advertisement remarked:

"Moral young man wanted to go a little ways out into the country. Must be a good driver and know how to milk. Address, with reference, P. Q., Methodistville, N. J."

I had no use for that.

All of the bill which I filled was in being a moral young man.

I attended Sunday-school till I was seven years old, and I never chew tobacco.

As for being a good driver, I am not. About the only animal which I think I could drive with success would be a cow.

Then I would have to persuade her to toddle by aid of a club.

Speaking of cows, I do not know how to milk.

Once only did I attempt to extract the lacteal fluid from the teats of the milky mother of the bovine herd.

The effort was a failure.

A most gilded one.

The cow remonstrated at my familiarity with her person and kicked.

Not metaphorically, but literally.

She let fly with one hind leg, and when I was picked up some twenty feet from the scene of the accident I was senseless.

It taught me a good lesson, however.

Experience is the best teacher, and I realized that I had ought to have known better than to go monkeying around cows when I could no more milk one than I could fly. It is not always best to be too recent.

The third advertisement, though, stole my heart away.

Here it is:

"Intelligent young man with small capital can make a fortune. Apply to Puff and Bluff, room No. 81, Skinner Building. Light, genteel work, just suited for gentlemen."

I flung down the paper.

It was needless to read further.

I knew I was an intelligent young man.

My sole desire was to make a small fortune.

And "light, genteel work" was just my pie.

That afternoon I wended my way to the office of Puff and Bluff, for, owing to an illegal but lucky investment in a lottery ticket, I had a small capital soaked away.

The office of Puff and Bluff was on the second floor and fitted up quite gorgeously.

I was impressed at its appearance.

Seated at a handsome desk was a gentleman, his feet cocked up on the desk.

The gentleman was gorgeous, like his surroundings. He wore a smoking jacket and cap, fawn-colored trousers and most exquisite slippers.

Jewelry seemed no object to him.

Diamonds sparkled all over his person.

Even to the extent of a cluster diamond ring, which dangled from a massive watch-chain.

Inquiringly looked he up as I entered, as he laid down a paper he was reading.

"Well, sir," asked he, "what can I do for you?"

I told him.

"Have I the pleasure," I asked, "of addressing either of the firm?"

He nodded.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "I am Mr. Bluff. Have you business with us?"

"I would like to become allied to you, in a business sense."

He smiled.

All over, it seemed.

"Just walk inside the railing," he said, as he arose and swung open a gate which gave me admission into his presence.

He offered me a chair.

As I always make it a rule to accept all I can get free, I accepted it.

And deposited my corpulence (about ninety-five pounds) into it.

The chair behaved nobly.

She did not break down, but stood the weight of my physique without a creak.

From one of his pockets he drew forth a cigar.

No pool-for-drinks cigar.

But one of those with a belly-band around its waist. As a rule, for such cigars, which generally come at a quarter, you pay twenty cents too much.

I accepted the weed.

I lit it.

To do it justice, it was passable, and I awaited for further news of how the small fortune was to be obtained.

Mr. Bluff soon told me.

"We," he suavely said, "are publishers of subscription books."

"Yes, sir."

"And our latest book is doomed to create a big sensation."

"I hope so."

"Its title is sufficient to sell it on sight."

"What is its title?"

"'Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World.'"

Judging from its title, I imagined that the book would create a sensation.

"Now," said Mr. Bluff, "there are hundreds of dollars to be made canvassing for this great historical work. The book I sell to you for three dollars."

"Yes, sir."

"You will find the price marked inside as five dollars."

"Yes, sir."

"You will find that every one will believe that to be its real value."

"I suppose so."

Mr. Bluff winked cunningly.

"Here is where you get your fine work in."

"How?"

"Everybody, especially the ladies, like to think that they are making a bargain."

"Yes."

"Well, just you tell them by buying in large quantities you are able to dispose of them for three dollars, and always add that now is their time to make a bargain. Tell them they will never get such another chance in their lives."

Mr. Bluff was gifted with the gift of gab to an unlimited extent.

I believe he could have talked a mocking-bird into a stupor.

The result of the interview was that I invested in ten sample copies, just for a flyer.

If I sold them, which, beguiled by Mr. Bluff's artful taffy, I had no doubt of doing, I would be twenty dollars ahead, which was pretty good for a day's work, for he assured me I would have no possible debar to selling them in a day.

After an affectionate parting from Mr. Bluff, who prophesied that he would see me often, now that I had struck such a soft snap for the accumulation of wealth, I left, not before he, though, with business foresight, "blown off" to a second cigar.

In the preceding paragraph I have mentioned that Mr. Bluff was a man of business foresight.

So he was.

I took things easy on my journey home.

Why not?

A prospective millionaire like myself ought to be able to do so.

I walked up-town instead of riding, and dropped into a billiard saloon to pass the time away.

I succeeded.

Not only did I pass the time away, but I passed a couple of dollars away into the coffers of a natty young man whom I met there.

I had never seen him before.

I never want to see him again.

He roped me in nicely, because he was a regular billiard sharp, and played me for what is titled in the upper circles of society a "rank gilly."

We played three games.

The first game I beat him in a gallop.

I was out before he had more than a dozen buttons on his string.

He appeared nettled.

As for me, I felt elated.

"Say, my friend," he alleged, "you play a nice game."

"Nothing extra."

"But you do."

"You flatter me."

"No, I don't, but yet I have an idea I can beat you."

"I have no doubt of it."

"You flatter me in turn. You see, I was in tough luck."

"Yes."

"The balls rolled against me."

"I'll own that."

"To prove that I think I can best you I will play you for a dollar."

As I had beaten him so easily, it was naught but sportsman-like etiquette.

We played another game.

I kept ahead until near the finish.

I led him ten points.

Then he chalked his cue and made a break.

I wish he had not.

The break broke me all up.

He ran out most gracefully.

This nettled me.

I played a second contest of the ivory spheres.

Result the same.

Beat.

Another dollar out.

Maybe I might have been inveigled into another game, and dropped another hundred cents, had not a new character appeared on the scene.

He was a man of massive build and resolute air.

His first act was decisive.

He grabbed the gentleman with whom I had been playing by the collar.

Not alone did he subject him to this indignity, but he bestowed several kicks on that part of the person which it generally takes the most cloth to cover.

His language was terse.

Tensely vigorous.

"Get, you infernal sharper sardine!" he ordered.

"Get!"

The mandate was obeyed.

He got.

He stood not on the order of his going, but he went at once.

The gentleman who had thus summarily disposed of him evidently deemed some explanation due to me.

"Were you playing billiards with that skin?" he asked.

"Is he a skin?" I innocently asked.

"Is he? He's a regular professional billiard sharp. He can play a game equal to any of the regular professionals. How much did he collar you for?"

"Collar me for what?"

"Cash?"

"Only two dollars."

"Well, I guess you can stand that, but you can bet that when my room-keeper comes in again—I see he has skipped, and wisely, too, for I feel just ugly enough to wring his neck—I will give him fits for allowing you to be choused out of your money in that way. I don't run no brace game."

I thanked the rough-tongued but well-meaning owner of the billiard-room and vanished.

CHAPTER II.

THE firm with whom I had connected myself was an enterprising one.

It did not allow grass to grow under its feet.

When I reached home I found a package, a bulky package, done up in brown paper and well secured by a labyrinth of cord and sealing-wax.

I cut the cords and found when I opened it that it contained copies of the requisite number of "Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World."

They had sent it C. O. D., and I had to pay a dollar for its freight, which dampened my spirit somewhat. It cut a hole in my profits. I reside at present with an aunt of mine and she, like all of her sex, is blessed (?) with an infinite amount of curiosity.

"What was in that box?" she asked.

Desiring to tease her, I answered:

"Fish."

She frowned.

Her brows corrugated ("corrugated" is a very good word, and if it makes a hit I will use it again).

"When I was young it was considered very disrespectful for a young man to make a disrespectful answer like that to an older person."

"Excuse me, aunty," I apologized, "I only wanted to tease you. The box contains the 'Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World.'"

At this announcement a trembling spell seized my aunt, who is prone to hysterics, anyway, on the slightest provocation.

"Where have you got them?" she asked. "Are they dangerous?"

"No," laughed I. "You must not interpret my words literally. They are in a box, but they are not alive."

My aunt, to tell the truth, is not very smart, and my uncle must have married her more for her beauty than her intellect.

She heaved a sigh of relief.

"I'm so glad!" she said.

"I am glad that you are glad," I observed. "Aunty?"

"Well?"

"They are nothing but books, and that is their title. I have got tired of loafing, for you know my writing does not take up much of my time, and so I have made up my mind to turn a peddler of books for a little while and make some extra money."

My aunt applauded my decision.

"I would if I were you," she said. "Now is the time that you should try to make all of the money that you can while you are young and healthy. You say that you have got the books in the hall?"

"Yes'm."

"Would it be too much trouble to let me look at one?"

"Not at all."

I left the room.

Soon I returned with a specimen copy.

She examined it.

The volume was illustrated.

That is to say, in a fashion.

It contained a series of vile wood-cuts of the illustrious criminals mentioned, beginning at Cain and ending up at Guiteau.

Worse than all, the photographs were not true to life.

Cain, I could see, was simply an old block of some Indian chief, while the fact could not be disguised that General Washington masqueraded as the slayer of Garfield.

But my aunt did not know the difference.

She took them to be *bona fide* counterfeit presentations.

Her interest in the literary fraud developed as she examined its pages.

"How much is it?" asked she.

"Aunty?"

"Yes."

"The right price is five dollars."

"My, but ain't that high?"

"No, but listen!"

"I am."

"I can sell it to *you* for three."

"You can?"

"Yes."

"How is that?"

"You see I am a special agent."

"Yes."

"And I buy the books in large quantities."

"Indeed!"

"'Tis true, and if you want this great historical work, which is an invaluable ornament to any library, take it for three."

Then I showed her where the book was marked five dollars.

That settled it.

She went to a bureau drawer and took out a fat purse.

From it she gave me three dollars, which I pocketed.

"Much obliged," I said. "It is ever so kind of you to give me my first start in my new enterprise."

My aunt folded her hands placidly in her lap.

"Edward?" said she.

"What, aunty?"

"You know the old proverb."

"Which one?"

"The Lord helps them who help themselves."

"Yes'm."

"And so I thought to encourage you I would buy one, although when your uncle comes home he will snarl for a while and jaw me for obtaining it. You know what a crank he is."

Her words were prophetic.

My uncle, to a limited extent, is a crank.

A very mild one, however.

His bark is decidedly worse than his bite, metaphorically speaking.

He takes it out in barking, and never bites.

In time for supper my respected relative appeared.

But supper did not come in time for him. Some mishap had occurred in the culinary department.

The first thing he did after favoring me with a brief nod was to growl about the absence of the meal.

"Nice thing, Eliza," he snorted, as he flung himself into a chair.

"What is a nice thing, John?" she meekly inquired.

"No supper!"

"But you must not blame me. The kitchen fire went out."

"It did?"

"Yes."

"Who let it go out?"

"The cook."

"She did?"

"Yes."

"That settles her stay beneath this roof. The idea of her permitting the fire to go out when she knows I want my meals punctually on time! When is her month out?"

"Saturday," my aunt returned with the utmost of tranquillity.

"I am glad of it."

"Why?"

"I will discharge her."

"I would not."

"And why not?"

"Because accidents will happen."

"Do you call allowing the extinguishment of the fire to take place an accident?"

"Yes."

"I don't, and no more such accidents will occur in future."

"Oh, John, don't fly up in a passion at a trifile."

"Do you call having no supper a trifile? Do you know what I have a great mind to do?"

"What?"

"Go out to a restaurant and get supper."

"John, you must be vexed to-night."

"Vexed, indeed! Ain't it enough to have a man's temper irritated to come home from the fatigue of business and find nothing to eat? I'll—"

Luckily for the peace of the family, the dinner-bell rang.

Still grumbling, my uncle led the pageant down into the banquet-hall.

The hapless servant girl, who knew her master's peculiarities, had endeavored to make amends for the dilatoriness of the meal by exercising extra care about it.

It was cooked to perfection.

When he concluded it my uncle's face was a picture of satisfaction.

He rang the hand-bell, and the domestic entered with fear and trembling.

"Bridget?" he said.

"Yis, sur," she quaked.

"Supper was behind-time to-night."

"It wur not me fault, sur, but that av the foire. It wud nayther burn the wan way or the other. Shure, there seems a spell upon it. Mebbe the chimney needs attenthion to on account av the draught."

"Perhaps it does. I will have the chimney investigated as soon as possible, and, Bridget—"

"Yis, sur."

"You asked permission of my wife, did you not, to go on a pic-nic next week?"

Bridget blushed.

"Yis, sur," she stammered. "Ye see, me steady company, to whom I am going to get married in the fall, is a Son av Temperance, and it is but natural that his family and himself should want me to go wid them."

"Perfectly natural. You can go."

"Thank ye, sur, a thousand toimes," and with a giggle she retreated.

The repast concluded, we adjourned up-stairs again.

Uncle John took his coat off and sat down in his easy-chair.

He drew a cigar-case from his pocket and offered me one.

I accepted it, and we puffed away in tranquillity for a few moments.

Until Uncle John, arising to skirmish for a cuspidor, discovered on the center table the copy of "The Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World."

He glared at it as if it were liable to explode.

Gingerly he picked it up.

He turned its leaves over.

"Where did this cheap compound of villainy come from?" he asked.

"I—I bought it," faltered my aunt.

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Who from?"

"Ed."

"What?"

"Yes."

My uncle turned to me in amazement.

He seemed at first as if he did not conjecture that he had heard correctly.

"Ed?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I promptly replied.

"Is this true?"

"What?"

"That which my wife just said about her purchase of this trashy volume from you?"

"It is."

"How much did it cost?"

"Three dollars."

"Ed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give her the money back."

"Hold on, uncle. You're a business man, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Then harken to me for a few seconds."

Without giving him a chance to interrupt me I explained about my idea for spending the summer, combining business with pleasure.

At the conclusion of my explanation my uncle thawed visibly.

"I am glad to learn that after all you have a little business in you outside of your nonsensical writing, and to encourage you I will buy a second copy. There are a lot of friends of mine who call on me at my office when I am busy. I'll take this second copy down to the office, and

when they come to talk me to death I will give them it to read till I am at leisure."

CHAPTER III.

I WILL own that I was greatly pleased at the auspicious opening of my new enterprise.

Several copies of my valuable volume sold already, and, better than all, the cash gobbled.

The next day could not be called a summery day.

The weather, with one of those unaccountable freaks so common this year, became almost cool enough for October.

Indeed, a spring overcoat, instead of being an article of luxury, was almost a necessity.

The weather, however, did not crush my ardor to get rid of my "Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World."

I started out bright and early with a specimen copy under my arm.

The first place I stopped to make a sale was at a brown stone mansion.

I rang the bell boldly.

A servant responded to my appeal.

She looked inquiringly at me.

"Can I see the lady of the house?" asked I.

"Please give me your card, sir?" she requested.

"Just tell her a gentleman desires to see her on business."

Somewhat dubiously she retreated, but soon returned with the intelligence that Mrs. Douglass, which was the name of the mansion's mistress, would receive me.

I followed the menial into a parlor.

A lady sat on a sofa.

She was no delicate fairy.

Contrariwise, she was a lady of massive architecture, and must have tipped the scales at about two hundred pounds avordupois.

Her upper lip was ornamented by a mustache which would have reflected credit on a grenadier, and the immortal son of the Bean City, John L. Sullivan, would have been jealous of her arms.

Her attire was, to draw the description as mild as possible, decidedly anomalous.

She wore a wrapper of a vivid red hue, immense slippers, and encircling her fair forehead was a circlet of straw.

I was so surprised at the spectacle she presented that I stopped and stared at her very impolitely, I am afraid.

But she attempted to put me at my ease.

"Sit down, young man," she ordered.

I obeyed.

I deposited my corpulence on the edge of a chair.

"Now, young man," asked she, "your name?"

Prudential reasons prevented me.

"My name is Norval," I answered, "although I do not hail from the Grampian Hills."

This brilliant rejoinder pleased her.

She laughed.

Then I noticed a peculiarity.

Her laugh, though boisterous, had not the genuine ring of mirth in it.

Rather was it the fleeting merriment of one partially bereft of one's senses.

"Now," she said, "what can I do for you?"

"I would like to see you on a simple matter of business."

"Business?"

"Yes, madam."

"Of what?"

"Excuse the seeming flattery, but you seem to me a lady of superior education."

"I am."

"I thought so."

"You are perfectly correct. I was educated at Vassar College."

"One could see that at a glance. Now as to my business with you. You are very fond of literature?"

"I am."

"Then I will explain the purport of what you might deem, I being a stranger to you, an invasion of your privacy. I have for sale copies of one of the greatest works of the age, elegantly bound and superbly illustrated."

Her eyes lighted up.

With a fitful fire.

"So you are a book peddler?" interrogated she.

"Yes, madam."

"Do you know what I generally do to book peddlers?"

"No, madam."

"I settle their hash very quickly."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Do you see that bell-rope at my elbow?"

"I do."

"Well, I just pull that!"

"Yes, madam."

"The pull is responded to."

"Doubtless."

"Do you know who by?"

"No."

"My footman, Richard. Richard, is a youth of muscle."

"Richards generally are, all except Richard the Third, and all of his muscle must have been concentrated in his hump."

She laughed that same maniacal laugh again.

"Richard," she said, "would come up here, seize you by the collar, and hurl you into the street. But in your case I will make an exception. What book are you selling?"

"One of the greatest works ever published, replete with sensation."

She looked pleased.

Her manner changed.

"I will tell you," she said, with a wary, shifting look in her eyes. "I like sensation. What do you call it?"

"'Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World.'"

She clapped her hands in glee.

"How much a copy?" asked she.

"Five dollars," I boldly answered.

"How many copies have you?"

"Only a couple."

"I will buy them, for I am very fond of anything sensa-

tional, and judging from its title I should judge that it would be something decidedly sensational."

"Just what it is."

The words were scarcely out of my mouth before the front door opened.

There was no ringing of the front door bell necessary, for "he" entered with a latch key.

By "he" I mean a gentleman about six feet in height, who could have picked me up like a bull-dog picks up a cat and dislocates the feline's neck by one vigorous crush of his powerful jaws.

At the sight of the new arrival the feminine purchaser of my books entirely changed her demeanor.

She cowered down on a sofa.

"Clarry, Clarry," she whined, "don't kill me!"

"But what means the presence of this young man here?"

"He is here by accident."

"I'll accident him."

Whatever else my maligners, if I have any, which I sincerely believe I have not, may say, I am no coward. (This goes for effect. If I had been I would have taken to my heels.)

I faced him boldly.

"Excuse me, sir," I queried, in as dignified accents as I could assume on the spur of the moment, "but really I cannot understand what you refer to. I simply am canvassing for a book, called the 'Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World.' I sold her two copies."

At my answer his whole demeanor changed.

"Is that so?" he asked of his wife.

"Yes."

This succinct answer cooled him off somewhat.

"My friend," he said, "maybe I have been a little too hasty with you, but you must excuse me. Will you step aside with me into the smoking-room?"

"I did so."

"There is a family skeleton," he said, as he indicated a chair, "in every family closet."

"Yes, sir," assented I.

"You sold her two copies of your book?"

"I did."

He assumed a confidential air, one that I could see was not assumed.

"My wife," he said, "while leaning out of the window one day with the only child that ever blessed our union, accidentally overbalanced herself, and to save her own life she had to drop our boy. He fell to the sidewalk, and he was killed. It occurred the day of Guiteau's hanging, and it occasioned the partial loss of her reason. Ever since, by one of those delusions so frequent to people out of their minds, she associates the two events together, and the mere sight of the assassin's picture would be apt to cause her to associate the two events together, and she would go into hysterics and be sick, perhaps, for weeks."

I felt sorry then that I had made the sale, and apologized.

"I would not have done it for worlds," I apologized, "and I am perfectly willing to refund the money."

"Oh, by no means. She cannot remember anything more than ten minutes, and already she has forgotten the purchase of the books, and has hidden them away in one of

her various hiding places. That is another mania of her's. Every new purchase that she gets she hides away, poor soul, always in the same place—two closets. She will soon take her morning's nap, and I will obtain the work and put it out of her reach."

"I am doubly obliged to you," said I.

"Not at all. Good-morning."

He bowed me out and I congratulated myself on getting out so politely.

At one portion of our interview it had looked very much as if I stood in great danger of being kicked out.

The next place I invaded was a pawnbroker's shop.

It seemed a queer place to tackle, but I have nerve enough, as a rule, to do most anything.

The pawnbroker was alone in his stronghold.

He was an old usurer.

Weazened in the face, and a perfect living skeleton in the frame.

Really he looked as if he were only posing where he was to save the expense of a funeral pageant.

He wore a black skull-cap which made him look more ghastly than ever.

His hands trembled, and it was with difficulty he addressed me:

"Vell, misder?" he asked with a smile which was about as pleasant as that of some festive ghoul, "vat can I do for you? Young vellers vill get in drouble, und I vill advance you more money then dat Irishman on de next plock on any amount of bersonal security."

"What do you call personal security?"

"Diamonds, vatches und brecious stones."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Mr.—what is your name, anyhow?"

"Cohen."

"I am very sorry that I am not gifted with such possessions, Mr. Cohen."

He looked grave.

He appeared to look like a resurrected corpse.

"Maype you vant to hock dat coat. If you vos, I vill give you forty cents on it," he liberally offered.

"No, I don't vant to pawn anything at all. I want to make a sale."

"A sale?"

"Yes."

As I said this I accidentally winked to remove a piece of dust which had obtruded itself without an invitation in my eye.

His whole demeanor changed.

The demon of Avarice seemed to take possession of him.

"Shakey?" he cried.

In answer to the call a sleepy-looking boy came out of a back room, excavating his frowsy hair with his long, filthy finger nails.

"Shakey," he commanded, "tend to peezness for a moment. This shentleman und I vas got imboldant peezness, und we will dalk it ofer in the brivate room. Shoost walk in."

The "private room" alluded to was a filthy apartment, simply curtained off from the store.

Its furniture was very succinct.

It comprised a sofa in the last stages of consumption and a rickety chair.

I selected the chair as a suitable roost.

Mr. Cohen inhabited the sofa.

"Now," he said, "lisden to my sbeeches. I know vat you vas got in dot pundle."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then tel' me what it is?"

"Sdolen property."

"What?"

"Yes."

"What are you giving me?"

"Fact; I can tell py your guilty manner. But sh! I vill pe easy mit you."

"Thanks."

"Some men would send right avay owit and gife you in sharge auf a boliceman; but I vas not that kind. You swiped the goods, vatafer dey vas, and you know it."

"I did not."

"All righd to say. Listen again!"

"I am."

The Hebrew bent his mouth down to my ear.

He almost hissed:

"My poy?"

"Well?"

"I vill pe easy mit you."

"Merci."

"Yes, I vill hafe mercy."

He squatted closer than ever to me.

"Young veller," he whispered, "I vos more than a money broker."

"You are?"

"Yes."

"What else besides?"

"A fence!"

CHAPTER IV.

You can bet that I am not the sort of a huckleberry to disregard the significance of the word "fence."

"Fence," I grieve to say, is the criminal slang for one who receives stolen property and disposes of it.

The fence never gets left.

The atmosphere is never frigid for him, because to make himself secure he generally "stands in" with the police and "whacks up" with them. This may seem a slur on "the finest," but "allec samee," as the almond-eyed Celestial says, it is true in a multitude of cases.

I arose.

I put on as fierce an air as I could assume.

He looked surprised.

"Vot vos the matter?" asked he. "Vos there bedbugs where you vos that makes you fly ub so gwick?"

"No," I said, sternly, "but little you know who I am."

"Who are you?"

"Nothing more than a simple peddler of books. Look!"

To prove this assertion I undid my package.

I slammed a copy of the book down on the dusty counter with a vehemence that made Mr. Cohen jump.

"Now, you gristly old Death's Head," I emphasized, "I have you at my mercy!"

"How?" he quavered, collapsing at once.

"I intend to lodge a complaint at Police Headquarters against you."

His face grew more livid.

"Holy Moses!" he ejaculated, "for vot?"

"Have you not acknowledged yourself that you were a fence?"

"But that vos in gonfidence."

"Confidence be hanged. I know that you have been up before in several questionable transactions before the courts."

Actually, I never knew anything of the sort.

A total stranger to me was he before our meeting; but, as it often happens, the chance arrow-shot hit home.

"Sh!" he nervously said. "How much vos the vork?"

"Ten dollars," I answered, raising the ante on skin-flint, for I well knew he could well afford to part with some of the wealth that he had accumulated from those unfortunates who had to seek assistance from him.

It almost seemed as if he would fall apart as he called out:

"Shakey," he yelled to the uncleanly youth, "come here."

Jakey came.

"Shakey," he said, "vas dere ten tollars mit the till?" As he inquired he winked.

But I was onto the wink.

I tumbled to it in a flash.

"That is all right, Mr. Cohen," I said. "You know very well that there are tens of ten-dollar bills in your till, not to speak of the boodle in the safe."

At the mention of the word "safe" the old Shylock appeared to have an attack of chills and fever.

"How do you know," he queried with chattering teeth, "dot I vos own a safe?"

"I know well enough, and I know just where it is. You better look out, or I will come around and crack it. I am an honorary member of the Burglars' League."

Of course, as the reader can judge for himself, this was the rankest of nonsense.

But a guilty conscience, as has been frequently said, makes cowards of all.

"My poy," he said, "I puys that pook about dem 'Murderers and Murderesses mit America,' but I only vish for one ding."

"What's that?"

"That you gets plowed up py dynamite."

Then he called for his menial, "Shakey," to bring him in ten dollars.

Jakey did.

He arrived with the amount requested.

The fortune embraced no greenbacks.

It was all in silver.

Ten silver dollars were deposited into my paw one by one by Mr. Cohen, who groaned deeply as he dropped each one.

"Now," said he, "vos you satisfied?"

"Not much," I answered. "You are a more diabolical skin than I imagined."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, you don't know, do you?"

"I am sure I vos not."

"Well, it is too bad about you. Do you see these five dollars?"

"Yes," he owned.

"They are lead!"

He made a pretense of examining them.

He shook his head dolefully.

"Daniel in the lion's den," he uttered, "I vos ruined, I thinks I vos go owit py the peezness altogether. I vos getting old and feeble, and I vos cheated on aferly side. My tear young mans?"

"Yes, sir."

"Vot you subbose?"

"About what?"

"Vot occurred to me last Vensday come two weeks."

"I'm sure I don't know."

"I vos sitting here, when in comes a nobby veller, and he asked me how much would I give him on a diamond of the fairst vater. I examined the stone."

"Yes."

"It seemed to me all righd."

"Yes."

"And I, oh! vot a fool I vos, lent him one hundred tollars on it."

"And got a bargain, I'll bet."

At the mention of the word "bargain" the venerable Shylock had a trembling fit.

He shook all over and threatened to fall to pieces on the floor behind the counter.

"A pargain!" he cried. "Oh, it vas a pargain. The veller vas a schwindler."

"He was?"

"Yes."

"In what respect?"

"The diamond vas vashed."

"Washed?"

"Yes."

"What for? Was it dirty?"

Mr. Cohen made an impatient gesture.

"You vas not dumble?" said he.

I frankly owned that I did not.

"A vashed diamond," he informed me, "vas a diamond fixed ub py some chemical preparadion. It is really a snide diamond, but the deception cannot be detected unless the stone is vashed in soap and vater. Like a madman I let him have the monish, pecause I thought that it vas sdolen, and he vould nefer come to redeem it. That night I happened to think vot a fool I had been not to vash it in soap and vater."

"Proceed."

"I vashed it."

"Yes."

At the remembrance of the harrowing event he was seized with such a violent fit of trembling that I had a good mind to rush out somewhere and get a pail of water to throw over him.

However, he did not expire, but presently recovered his mental equilibrium.

"The diamond," he said, "after it was washed, I found out to be a snide sdraw-colored stone, hardly worth forty dollars. I felt just like going ouid and drownding myself beneath a sbrinkling cart."

"Mr. Cohen," said I, "my time is valuable."

"Ish that so?"

"Yes."

"Vell, den hurry avay. Peezness vas peezeess *allerwile*."

"That is so, and as my business lies with you, I want you to do me a favor."

"With pleasure, my poy."

"Just give me a ten-dollar bill for these lead dollars."

"Lead tollars?"

"Yes."

"You must be vild!"

"Well, I ain't. Fork over!"

Evidently he considered that fate was against him.

After a series of appalling moans he produced a greasy wallet.

He handed me a ten-dollar bill and I restored to him his spurious coin.

I turned to leave.

"Much obliged to you," I said. "Good-day."

And as I passed out of the door I heard him mutter:

"That poy vill either make his mark in the world or pe hung on the gallows. He vas too smart for his own goot."

CHAPTER V.

HAVING sold my two books, I naturally felt elated.

I went home after more.

It was dinner-time when I arrived, and I found Deacon Grabber at the table.

I like the deacon.

He is a truly holy man.

That is in his own opinion.

He is one of those Christians who believe that all of us, except a few of the elect, like himself, will when they die be gobbled right up by his Satanic Majesty, and gloats over the belief.

"Edward," he said, in sepulchral tones, "how are you?"

"Fine as silk."

"By that I suppose you mean that you are enjoying excellent physical health?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why will you use slang?"

"It is all the fashion."

"Edward?"

"Yes, sir."

"I interrogated you about your physical health."

"You did."

"Now I have another question to propound to you. How is your religious health?"

"Booming."

"I am sincerely pleased to hear it. When were you to church last?"

"Sunday night."

"I am pleased to know it. How did you enjoy the sermon?"

"I did not enjoy it at all."

"What?"

"Did not you hear me twitter?"

"That is strange. It was a most powerful theological discourse."

"No doubt of it."

"Then why did not you like it?"

"For a very simple reason."

"Which was?"

"I never heard it."

The deacon looked puzzled.

"You never heard it?" repeated he.

"No, sir."

"I trust you did not commit the gross impropriety of falling asleep in the sanctuary?"

"No, sir."

"How was it that you were in the sanctuary and did not hear the discourse?"

"Deacon?"

"Well?"

"You are a little rattled at my statement of being at church."

"Rattled?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rattled is more slang, I conjecture?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does it mean?"

"Confused. I said I was *at* church, but I did not say I was *in* church."

"Where were you?"

"Outside, sitting on the stoop."

"What doing?"

"Waiting for church to be dismissed."

"What was your object in waiting for the expiration of divine services?"

"I wanted to hook on to her wing and hurry her home before any of the dudes had a chance to brace her. She is a daisy, she is, but I would not introduce her to you. They say you are a regular masher."

The old man's face relaxed.

"You would not?" he said, with a wintry smile.

"Decidedly no."

"Why not?"

"Because I know what a masher you are."

At this rather irreverent speech he appeared to be horrified.

But I could see that he was not. He was flattered.

"Edward," he asked, "how dare you accuse me of such a misdemeanor?"

"Because it is true. Never a Sunday night do you walk home without one, and more oftener two of the sisters on each arm."

At this the deacon looked confused.

Especially as all around the table laughed.

He hurried to shift the subject.

"Edward," said he, "what is your occupation at present? Have you, except writing deceiving trash for that trashy story-paper, anything else to do?"

"I have."

"What?"

"Deacon?"

"Yes?"

"You are my oyster. I mean to open you for three dollars."

"Three dollars!"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"A book which will please you."

"Is it a scriptural work?"

"Partially."

"What does it contain about the scriptures?"

"Cain was a scriptural person?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's in."

"Is he?"

"He is. He is held up to the rising generation as a horrible example of the consequences of jealousy. Would he have laid out unsuspecting Abel with a club had he not been inflamed with the demon of jealousy?"

"No."

"But as yet you have not mentioned the name of the work."

"Famous Murderers and Murderesses of the World."

More horror was depicted on his face.

"You do not mean to tell me," he queried, "that you are peddling such vile literature?" he demanded.

"I beg your pardon. It is not a vile volume."

"Its title would so imply."

"Say, deacon?"

"Well?"

"You don't condemn a book without looking at it, do you?"

"No."

"Then just take a look at a copy."

I procured one and placed it in his possession.

At first he shammed to turn over its pages with disgust.

The pretense of aversion only lasted a short period.

When he had read a couple of the lives of the illustrious criminals embraced in the book he forgot himself.

I could see that he was deeply engrossed in its perusal.

I ventured to interrupt him.

"Well, deacon," I asked, "ain't that a real moral work?"

"Ye—es," slowly confessed he; "but you should not sell them indiscriminately."

"I do not."

"You must exercise judgment."

"I do."

"Not sell it to minors, or those disposed to be hysterical."

"I never do."

"That is right. And now, ahem, how much is the book?"

I told him the same old gag about the price of the book.

He bit.

"The volume," he said, "in judicious hands, may be a great moral engine for good."

"Of course it is; and, deacon——"

"Well?"

"It could not be in better hands than yours. Well you know how to depict in your glowing oratory the inevitable consequences of crime."

The taffy took.

He pulled out a purse.

That is, one of those ten-cent apologies for purses carried by dudes and skinflints in general.

Carefully he counted over the three dollars.

It was all in silver.

Quarters and fifty-cent pieces, and one of the quarters was plugged.

I did not growl, however.

My profit was enough on the transaction.

"I am very much obliged, deacon," I said, "and I doubt not that your burning eloquence will snatch many a brand from the burning embers."

"I sincerely hope so," he answered, "and I trust—ahem—that you will succeed in your new enterprise."

I thanked him and chuckled to myself.

There never was a truer saying than Shakespeare's "What fools we mortals be?"

"Taffy" in this world is a powerful factor, and the deacon and I parted on the best of terms.

He even asked me if he could dispose of a few copies on his own account, would I allow him a commission?

Cheerfully I assented.

I saw anew field open to me, with him as an intermediary, in church circles.

"Yes, deacon," I said, "I'll treat you square. I'll give you fifty cents on every copy of the work you sell."

His little avaricious eyes shone with delight.

"I will try my best," he said, "to dispose of as many volumes as I can."

My uncle that night was in a wonderful good humor.

He had made certain successful business ventures, and he felt at harmony with himself and everybody else.

After supper, as we roosted on the front stoop in the time-honored New York style, he presented me with a cigar and inquired how my canvassing was getting along.

I know pretty well how to take my relative, and so I winked.

"Splendid," I said. "I had a new customer to-day."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"You could not guess if you guessed for a century."

"Probably not. Who was it?"

"Deacon Grabber."

My uncle looked incredulous.

"What are you giving me?" asked he.

"Facts."

"You don't mean to say that that dried up old fraud bought a copy?"

"He did."

My uncle burst out laughing.

And when he does laugh it does you good to hear him.

"Eliza," he said to my aunt, "if that don't beat the deck. The idea of that old miser buying a book."

"You blamed me for buying my copy," quietly re-

joined my aunt, who for once felt that she had the bulge on her somewhat despotic husband, "and yet a religious man like the deacon purchases one."

My uncle sniffed.

"His religion don't amount to much," he vociferated.

"Sh! Ain't you ashamed to talk that way?"

"No, I ain't. He is a regular old Pharisee."

"Oh!"

"Don't! Oh, I guess I know what I am conversing about. Ed?"

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"You ain't such a born fool as I have always taken you to be."

"Thanks, *monsieur*."

"And hanged if I don't buy another copy of your book."

He was as good as his word.

He forked over the rhino like a perfect gentlemen for another "Murderers and Murderesses."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day I thought I would visit the business districts of the city, and try my luck with the merchants.

I did so.

I chartered an Eighth avenue car and got out at Vesey street.

I was not particular what kind of a merchant I buzzed, so I entered the first building I came to, which chanced to be a wholesale seed store.

A dapper clerk came briskly forward.

"Good-morning," he affably saluted. "What can I do for you?"

I did not think it worth while to brace him to buy a copy of my book.

Young gentlemen of his age do not go in for literature to any great extent.

They prefer to expend their cash on perfumery and hair oil.

"Is your employer in?" I asked.

"Mr. Sprouts?" he said.

"Yes," I answered, although I did not know that was his name.

But it was.

A very appropriate name was it, too, as I found out to my sorrow.

He put me through a course of "sprouts."

"What name will I state?" asked the clerk.

"You need not mention any name. Simply state that a gentleman wishes to see him on private business."

"All right, sir."

He departed.

He came back laughing.

"The old man has got them again," he explained as a cause of his mirth.

His language was a little enigmatical for me to comprehend.

"Really I don't tumble," I said.

"Oh, Sproutsy, the old duffer, is a regular crank, and something has gone wrong in business this morning, and he is as cranky as a bear with a sore head. Say, sir?"

"Well?"

"If your business is not very important, I would give you a word of advice."

"What?"

"Don't trouble him."

"Why not?"

"He is liable to kick you out."

"Kick me out?"

"Yes."

I smiled incredulously.

I was muchly too previous in smiling.

"I guess not!" I answered.

"All right. Try your luck."

"I mean to."

Poor I.

Would that I had taken his advice.

Decidedly better would it have been for me had I never encountered Mr. Sprouts.

But not being a clairvoyant, I could not lift the veil of futurity. (The last sentence is a very nice one, and I hope it will be appreciated.)

I went to Mr. Sprouts' private office at the rear of the store.

I knocked at the door.

"Come in," I heard from the inside, in a muffled growl. I did so.

I beheld a gentleman with a very red face and a nose to match.

His hair stuck straight up like the quills on the back of a porcupine, and he was very stout.

"You say you want to see me, young man?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "You are Mr. Sprouts, are you not?"

"I am."

"It affords me great pleasure to meet you."

"Humph! Why?"

"Because I can see at the first glance that you are a gentleman of superior education."

"Humph! Go ahead."

"I have with me a book which you will assuredly appreciate."

"A book?"

"Yes, sir."

"What sort of a book?"

"One of the greatest books of the age."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"Its name?"

"'Celebrated Murderers and Murderesses of the World.'"

"How much?"

"Three dollars; but the right price is five; but on account of my buying them in bulk I get them cheap. The book's real value is five dollars."

"Is it?"

"Yes."

"Young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you a family or a widowed mother depending on you for support?"

"No, sir."

"It's lucky."

"Why?"

"For one cent I would fire you through the door."

"You would?"

"Yes."

This belligerent declaration astounded me.

"Why?" asked I, in surprise.

"You sent word in that you had private business with me."

"I did."

"And is this 'private business'?"

"Yes, sir."

He arose with his face—which, as I mentioned before, was red enough naturally—redder than ever.

Its hue resembled that of a boiled lobster.

"If you know what is good for you, you will skip," he said.

Would I had skipped.

It would have saved me considerable inconvenience and loss of personal dignity.

But I did not skip.

I considered it derogatory to my bravery to do so.

"I do not see," I began, "why I should be chased out like a dog for simply trying to make an honest living by selling books."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Well, I'll show you, that is all. Mike!"

In reply a great, big, brawny porter appeared.

He had the build of a Hercules.

"Mike?" said Mr. Sprouts.

"Well, sur?"

"See this young man?"

"Yes, sur," answered the individual with the cognomen of Mike.

"I want you to do some work."

"Yes, sur."

"See this fresh young man?"

"The bye ye are spaking to?"

"Yes."

"I do, sur."

"Bounce him."

Evidently Mike was accustomed to implicit obedience.

He wasted no time in asking what I had done that I should be ejected.

Instead he acted promptly and vigorously.

He caught me by the collar.

And before I was really aware of what had taken place I found myself sitting on the sidewalk all in a heap.

And a most unpresentable heap I was.

My coat was nearly ripped from my back and my pants were lacerated.

My collar and necktie were literally torn from my shirt.

When I recovered from the surprise into which the porter's energetic action had thrown me it was but natural that I was indignant.

Nay, I was more than indignant. I was mad—mad as a hornet.

I resolved to see if canvassers had no rights which fiery-tempered cranks were bound to respect.

Just then a policeman approached.

Any one could tell at one glance at his face that he was an Irish policeman.

He looked astonished at my wretched condition.

"Young man," asked he, "what have you been doing to get tore up loike that?"

"Nothing," I replied. "Officer?"

"Well?"

"I want you to make an arrest."

"Ye do?"

"Yes."

"Av who?"

"You see that feed store?"

"Ould Sprouts?"

"Yes."

"Well, what av it?"

"Sprouts is the man I want arrested."

"What for?"

"He assaulted me and flung me out of the store."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"What did ye do?"

"Nothing at all."

"That's quare. Ye must have done something to provoke him."

"I simply went in to sell him a book."

A shrewd look came into the officer's eyes.

"I see it now," he said. "He did not want to buy the book?"

"No."

"And ye kept tasing him to buy it until he fired ye out?"

"Yes, and I want him arrested."

The officer nodded his head in dissent.

"It is not me that will do it," said he.

"Why not? He assaulted me."

"He had a roight to."

"I'd like to know how you make that out?"

"Very aisy."

"How?"

"He ordered you out, did he not?"

"He did."

"Ye didn't go?"

"No."

"But gave him chin music instead."

"I only tried to argue with him that he ought to buy the book."

"Then he got mad and foired ye?"

"He did."

"Which he had a perfect right to do, seeing that ye wur making a nuisance av yesilf to him. Now let me give ye a tip."

"What?"

"Go into the saloon on the corner and fix yourself up."

I considered the advice excellent.

I followed it.

I repaired to the saloon.

The bar-keeper was alone behind the bar.

He was a jolly young fellow, and when I entered he gave a whistle of surprise.

"Young fellow," said he, "you look all tore up. How did it happen?"

I thought there was no use of disguising the facts of the case, so I told just how it did happen.

"Ain't at all surprised. Sprouts is a tough customer, and he generally keeps pretty full."

"Does he?"

"Yes, he's an awful lush."

"Is he?"

"Well, I should smile to blush. He had three whisky cocktails with absinthe in them this morning."

"Indeed! Hearing you talk of whisky cocktails, I am not a drinking man, but I do not think a little stimulant will hurt me now. Make me one, will you, please, but omit the absinthe."

"Cert. Of course a cocktail won't hurt you. Just the reverse. I will build you a daisy."

He was as good as his word.

"He did 'build me a daisy.'"

"How is that?" asked he, with professional pride. "I am great on cocktails. Ever heard of Major Buncombe, who lives at the Hoffman House?"

Really I never had.

But, to humor him, I said that I had.

"Know him?" asked the barkeeper.

"Not personally, but by reputation."

"He is a rare old sport."

"So I have heard."

"What he don't know about drinks ain't worth finding out."

"I should think so."

The barkeeper leaned over the counter with a confidential air and remarked:

"Would you believe it, he comes all of the way down from the Hoffman House, which is supposed to have the finest cafe and bar in the world, to have me build him up a cocktail? Ain't that a compliment?"

"I should say so."

CHAPTER VII.

THE answer pleased my new-found friend.

"Let me build you up another cocktail?" he requested.

"Much obliged," I said, "but no, thanks."

"Why?"

"If I should imbibe a second cocktail, you would have to send me home in a coach."

He laughed good-naturedly.

"Well," he said, "it is very seldom that I drink myself, and never behind the bar. But about once in every six months I get started, and then look out."

"Why?"

"I'm gone for a week, until the boss collars me somewhere and lugs me home."

"He does?"

"Yes. He thinks all in the world of me because he knows I am popular, and he pays my fine, for generally I have tried to paint the town red and tried to lick a couple of the cops, and he usually finds me in jail. But I forgot while chinning that you want to fix yourself."

"Yes."

"Go right through the door you see marked 'Private,' and you will find towels and soap and a hair-brush, and here's a paper of pins with which you can hump yourself together again."

I thanked him and entered the private room.

I found the articles he named and managed to fix myself up a little decent.

When I returned the bar-keeper expressed his approval at my altered appearance.

"You faked up quick, young feller," he said, "and you're all right now. Say!"

"Well?" I answered; "but first you must have something with me."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I ain't that sort of a leech. Because I done you a little favor I won't stick you for poison."

"But have a cigar?"

"Young feller!"

"Yes."

"I see you are a sticker."

"I hope so."

"Bound to keep your end up."

"I try so to do."

"That is right. I will take a cigar with you, and I'll bite the end off now, so that you can see that I won't put it in my pocket, pretending that I don't want to smoke just now, and sell it over. Say!"

"Yes."

"While you have been away I was taking a liberty."

"What?"

"You left that book which you are selling with me, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"I had the nerve to examine it without asking your permission, which I know ain't according to manners, but I did not think you would care."

"Oh, that is all right. I'll lend you one if you want it." He looked a little offended.

"I guess, young feller," he said, "that you needn't lend me any. I can buy one. I didn't read much, but from what I did read—you see I never went to college—that the book is a scalper. How much?"

I told him.

"I am your watermelon," he uttered.

He did not pull out any wallet.

Instead, he pulled out the till.

He counted over the money which it contained.

"Sixty-three dollars," he said. "Pretty good for this time of the year. Here!"

As he spoke, he handed me over three dollars.

"The boss will never miss it," he said. "He is the most careless man I ever saw about business matters. That is down here."

"What do you mean about down here?"

"He has three places."

"Has he?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"One up-town, this one, and a lum-tum place on Coney Island. Come to think, I'll put it down in the book."

"What book?"

"I have to keep an expense book, of course."

"What is that?"

"An account of everything I pay out."

"Yes."

"And I will enter my purchase in the expense book, and before he shows up in the morning—to-morrow—I will buy a big brass chain and hitch it to a big pillar up in the reading-room."

"Have you a reading-room?"

"Well, we call it a reading-room, but generally it is used to read only one kind of literature."

"What is that?"

"The cards. Tumble?"

I did not.

I avowed the fact.

"What kind of cards do you mean?" I asked.

"They ain't cards of buttons, or *carte de visites*, but real playing-cards, and there is a lively game going on in the reading-room which is called poker. Can you play it?"

I said that I had never played it but once, and then I held four queens.

One of the players, who was looking over my shoulder, told me I could not be beat and urged me to bet.

I did so.

I was called when I had almost my last chip on the table, and I laid down my hand.

To my astonishment my opponent laid down five kings.

I nearly had a fainting fit.

"How in thunder is that?" I made bold to inquire. "There are only four of any kind in an ordinary pack."

"But this is an extraordinary pack. It is Spanish poker, and it is played with four packs of cards. Oh, it is a great game."

The barkeeper grinned all over.

"Did you kick?" asked he.

"No," I replied. "What was the use? I had not stipulated what kind of a game of poker it would be, so they had me at their mercy."

"That's so," reflected the barkeeper; "and if you had made a muss you would have got the worst of it."

"No doubt."

"That shows you can balance yourself on your toes when necessary, and the day will be so cold that there will be icicles on the sun when you get left."

"I sincerely hope so, and the same to you. I am ever so much obliged for your kindness."

He pretended to be busy washing his dirty glasses behind the bar.

"That's all right, young feller," he said, "but I've sort of kindled up an affection for you, and if you come around to-morrow I will take an agency. You give a commission, don't you?"

I could well afford to.

"I'll bring you six to-morrow," I said, "and all that you sell I will give you a dollar on."

He snapped at the offer.

"But, of course," said I, "you must work them for five dollars."

"Will I?" he said. "That is what I call a square deal. Bring me down a dozen, and I will work them off. A dollar for me and a dollar for you. You bet I will gather in some ducats."

"I hope so."

"You can wager that I will. There are a lot of old

sports who hang around here who owe big bills. They are rich old cocks, and the only reason they don't pay cash down is because it would break their hearts to do so, they are so mean. Of course they pay in time, for they are all as good as gold. Now, I'll stick the books on them by putting on a long face, and telling them that the reign of 'tick' has lasted long enough, and if they don't settle up I will kick to the boss and have the credit system stopped. The news will paralyze them, and then I will work my little game."

"Which is what?"

"Work in the book."

"My book?"

"Yes."

"That will paralyze them, because the boss don't allow no hanging up, and he would raise thunder if he knew that I was running the distillery on the 'promise to pay' principle. But I'll tell them that as for me personally I don't care how big an amount they put on the slate, but that they ought to do me a favor for not splitting on them."

Here my friend paused.

To take breath.

He needed it.

From the volubility with which he had rattled away his throat must have been parched.

"Can't I induce you to try another cocktail?"

"No."

He produced a seltzer siphon.

He set out two glasses.

"A little seltzer won't hurt you," he said, as he squirted the mineral water into the two receptacles which he had placed for them on the bar.

"I don't mind seltzering," I said; "seltzer is innocuous."

"A what kind of a drink?" he asked, looking puzzled.

"Innocuous."

"Ain't that a foreign word?"

"No."

"English?"

"Yes."

"What does it mean?"

"Harmless."

He smiled, and chuckled to himself.

"I'll work it in," said he.

"What?"

"The word."

"Innocuous?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, I am engaged to one of the prettiest little cigarette-makers you ever saw, and when I shoot that word off at her she will think that I am a college graduate and be stricken dumb with admiration, for, though she is the best little girl in the world, she has had to work all of her life."

"How is that?"

"Her father is a regular lush, and spends most of his time on the Island."

"Has she a father?"

"Yes."

"What does he do?"

"He waits till the old lady gets sober—she drinks, too—

and then they change cars. He gets paralyzed and takes her place on the Isle de Blackwell."

By this time I felt weak.

If ever any one was in danger of being talked to death it was myself.

"I must go," I said. "How many copies do you want?"

"Twelve. Want the cash now?"

"No. I guess you ain't going to run away."

The answer pleased the barkeeper.

He presented me with a handful of cigars.

"Say!" he called out, as I was leaving, "I'll raise the ante on the books."

"How?"

"Bring me fifteen."

"I'll send them over in the morning."

"Don't forget."

"No."

Then we shook hands and parted. Not by the riverside, but by the bar-side.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT afternoon I sent over the books requested to the barkeeper, whose name, I afterward found out, was Gus Burgess, by a messenger boy.

He sent me back a receipt for them, which I have preserved.

Evidently Gus was not as handy with the pen as he was with the bottles, for I had hard work to decipher what it meant, but by aid of a magnifying-glass I finally made it out.

I laid off work the rest of the day and went to see a ball-match.

On my return home another surprise awaited me.

My uncle purchased another volume.

Not for himself, as he was careful to explain, but for a country customer.

"I could have sold him my office copy for two dollars more than I paid for it," he avowed, "but of course that would not be square."

Oh, mine uncle!

I don't want to insinuate a word against the business integrity of my uncle, but I would be willing to wager not a little that he charged his customer five dollars.

Reason why, that night he was in an exceedingly good humor for him, and he tossed my aunt a couple of silver dollars, a proceeding which nearly caused her to fall from her chair in surprise.

"Here," said he, "is two dollars I made unexpectedly to-day."

Shrewdly he had dropped to the way the books were marked, and made a couple of dollars himself.

That was his business, not mine, however, and I sold him another copy with the utmost of pleasure.

The following day I invaded Canal street.

The first establishment I went into was a Yankee notion store kept by a Yankee, and he was a Yankee indeed.

Also did the store not belie its title.

It contained all sorts of duds from a rusty old anchor (what mariner in the world, unless he was half seas over, would think of buying an anchor in Canal street?) down to papers of pins.

The proprietor's name was Jedediah Clutterback.

As I entered I beheld Mr. Clutterback taking things easy.

He was lolled back in a rickety chair, and had his feet perched on a desk which once, alas! had been handsome, but now was in the seer and yellow leaf.

In his mouth was a big cigar, a "ranker," which smelt most diabolically and must have cost at least a cent.

When he beheld me he started up with a jump, which sent the chair flying to the floor.

"Good-morning," he saluted. "Is not this a fine morning?"

"Charming!" I answered.

"The air so balmy."

"Yes."

"And the sprinkling cart which passes every hour lays the dust most beautiful."

"So it does. This is one of God's own days, as the French poet says, and we ought to be thankful that we are allowed to live and enjoy it."

"So we had. And now, young man, what can I sell you?"

I laughed.

But somewhat uneasily.

I did not know what ground I was treading on.

He might be a second Sprouts.

But I threw out my chest and answered:

"The shoe is on the other foot."

"How?" asked he.

I had learned that it was better not to be too fresh, so I laughingly said:

"I want to show you something."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Here!"

As I spoke I showed him the book.

I did not waste any taffy over him, because I knew he did not need it.

I simply made a plain statement of what a wonderful bargain he was securing.

He bit at the book bait of the cheap price, but he bit me worse in the end.

However, as all great novelists say when the printer's imp is waiting for copy, "let us not digress farther."

Of course not digressing farther has nothing to do with the story, but it spins out the book "all of the samee," as our Celestial Kingdom citizens iterate.

"See here," said he.

"Yes, sir."

"Business is awful bad."

"I hope not."

"But it is."

"Indeed. What is the cause?"

"Strikes."

"Strikes?"

"Yes."

"But how can that affect you?"

"I sell cheap goods."

"Yes."

"And deal with the lower classes."

"Naturally."

"Now, I've sort a took a likin' to you and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"The lower classes ain't apt to be supplied with any too much surplus cash, so I have bargains which will make your eyes bulge."

"What species of bargains?"

"Clothing."

"What of it?"

"I don't mean to offend you, but you ain't much of a dude."

"I know it."

"And that is where you make the] mistake. Good clothes frequently go a good deal farther than a good kerecter."

"Often."

"Suppose we swap?"

"How?"

"You give me four of the books, and I will give you a suit of clothes."

Now I needed a suit of clothes quite badly.

The one I had on had done me good service all winter. I had a secret consciousness that it ought to be shot. So I consented to the proposition.

He walked me into a curtained inclosure at the rear of the store, and began to bring on the suits in tiers.

He piled them down on the floor.

"Take your pick," said he.

I did.

Very soon.

There was a suit of shepherd's plaid, which I thought would about suit me.

"Now," he said, "you want a hat."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"What ails this hat?"

"Waal, you do have a nerve."

"How?"

"Asking such a question. Why, the crown is all cracked. I'd be ashamed, if I were you, to go out walking with such an ornament to my head as the one you have got. Give me another of them 'Murderers and Murderesses' and I'll give you a hat for it."

"That's kind."

"Of course it is. I'm a liberal man to deal with; and that is more, I am sorry to say, than I can say of my neighbors in the same line of business. Take that old Hebrew across the way. If you had blundered in there he would literally have robbed you."

"Would he?"

"Yes."

"Well, bring on the dicer," I answered. "Let me behold it."

He disappeared down in the cellar, I guess, for I saw him evaporate through the floor *via* a trap-door.

But, like the harlequin in the pantomime, his disappearance was very brief.

He bobbed again very soon serenely.

He held a stove-pipe hat in his hand.

The *chapeau* was of dazzling whiteness, and ornamented with a black band.

I tried it on.

It was my size precisely.

I looked at myself in the cracked, fly-bespecked glass.

For a wonder, it fitted me.

Never before had I had a high hat.

Because, to disclose a private grief, I am tall and thin, and am frequently called the "Walking Tongs" by some of my friends of a jocose disposition, on account of the unabridged condition of my legs. It seems to me sometimes as if they must originate beneath my shoulder blades and float down to the ground, and I considered that if I donned a high hat I would be a subject of constant derision.

But I determined to risk it.

The dicker was made.

The hat I put on.

Also my new suit.

Both fitted me.

That is temporarily at the time.

They did not before I reached home.

I bid Mr. Clutterbuck farewell, and in a burst of gratitude he offered me another bargain.

It was an umbrella.

Dirt cheap, he assured.

One dollar only.

All silk.

I concluded I had bought enough, and did not purchase it.

I wish I had.

I needed the "bumbershoot" before I reached home.

For with diabolical suddenness a thunder storm came up.

One of those confidence thunder-storms which do not give you any warning of their approach, but spring themselves on you without any warning.

It caught me unawares.

Down came the rain in regular sheets.

I ran for the first place of shelter I could find.

I choose as a haven a grocery store with an awning over it.

CHAPTER IX.

I SUPPOSE the purpose of the awning was to keep the sun's rays away and exclude rain.

Whoever built it ought to be shot.

His vocation plainly was not that of an awning maker.

It was not big enough to cover half of the space of sidewalk which it was expected to protect from a down-pour, and the result was I soon found myself becoming gradually drenched. I tried to enter the grocery store.

I could not get in, however.

Its proprietor was wise in his generation.

He did not want to have his store mussed up by a lot of dripping people, who would not buy anything if he did let them in, but only muss up the floor by their dripping garments and the inky water which oozed from the ferrules of their umbrellas.

I was doomed.

To stand outside.

And when finally the shower passed over I was a nice-looking sight.

My noble white hat was completely soaked, and my new suit of clothes was in an equally pleasant condition.

And the worst of it was, I had to walk home.

From no lack of funds, but one of those periodical nuisances, a car-drivers' strike, was on the bills just then, and Shank's mare was my only method of progressing.

I would not have cared so much about the pedestrian exercise, had I not before I had gone many blocks made two startling discoveries.

My elegant white dicer had lost its stiffness.

It sogged over my eyes in a helpless sort of way, and water from it dripped over my face.

As for my clothes!

That handsome suit of Shepherd's plaid.

They shrunk with such alarming rapidity that I began to be afraid I would be exposed to public view clad only in my underwear before I reached home.

Public attention was attracted to me.

Men stared.

Women giggled.

Boys hooted after me.

Such flattering hoots as:

"Look at the dude!"

"Ain't he a dandy!"

"How nice his clothes fit him."

"Look at the hat."

"Don't look at it. Rather get a gun and shoot it."

"Poor man! he's been drunk and got caught in the rain."

I am not naturally of a blood-thirsty disposition, but I felt that it would give me a good deal of satisfaction to wring all of their necks.

When I reached home the door was opened by my aunt. She was horror-stricken at my appearance.

I do not blame her.

When afterwards I caught sight of myself in the glass I felt that she had good cause to be.

If ever a young man had cause to feel totally demoralized it was myself.

"Edward," groaned she, "this is a terrible blow to me."

"What is?"

"Coming home this way."

"What way?"

"You don't know, do you?"

"No."

"Oh, Edward, my heart bleeds for you!"

"Aunty?"

"Yes."

"What in the world are you driving at?"

"I see it all."

"See what all?"

"You have yielded."

"To what?"

"The demon of drink. It is bad enough for your uncle to go to the club nights and meet with a lot of dissolute old roysterers, who send him home some nights long after midnight, and open the door for him because he is not able to open the door himself. But come in the house, but don't come in the parlor. You would drip it all wet from the water contained in your clothes. Go up in your

room and change your clothes. Oh, Edward—Edward, that you should have made the acquaintance of the serpent who lurks in the wine cup."

I got out of patience at her speech.

"I have not drank a drop to-day which would affect me."

"Do not add hypocrisy to your other vices."

"Aunt?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"You have been looking on the wine cup when it was red, as I said before."

"Aunt?"

"Well?"

"That ain't fair, and you know it. I never drink, except on rare occasions, such as marriages and births."

Then, as I did not desire to tease the good old lady any more, I told her just how I happened to be in my present unpresentable condition.

She believed me.

"Well," she said, "we are all liable to make errors. I make them myself."

"You do?"

"Yes. For instance, to-day I got caught in the sudden downpour of rain myself."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Careless on your part."

"And it, I am afraid, will ruin my new dress, and I only hope that it will not run the colors together; and if they do, oh, what a time I will have. Your uncle is so awful peculiar. He is like all of his sex."

"Excluding none?"

"No."

"He's selfish."

"Good."

"Avaricious."

"Better."

"He thinks only of himself."

"That shows he has a great head. If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will."

My aunt, for a wonder, saw the force of the logic.

"I suppose," she said, "that if I were like John I would be thought more of."

"No doubt about it. Why don't you give Uncle John thunder the next time that he jaws at you?"

"Would you?"

"Yes."

"What can I do?"

"Put on a little spunk."

"How?"

"Go for him with a broom when he begins his vocalisms. Just tell him that you've stood his abuse long enough, and go for him with the broom."

She looked with fear at the proposition.

"I would never have the courage to," she said.

"Yes, you have in a certain sense."

"How?"

"You're a naturally brave woman."

"I'm afraid that I am not."

"I say you are. He is always blowing about his courage."

"Yes."

"Boasting what a fighter he used to be when he was young."

"Yes."

"How he beat and pounded the life out of the other young men with whom he associated."

"Seems to me I have heard him go on in that way."

"Aunty?"

"Yes."

"He's all guff."

"What's that?"

"Why, he really himself is a coward at heart."

"He is?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Are you aware what his business friends call him?"

"No."

"Old Fireworks."

My aunt looked surprised at this veracious piece of information.

"They do?"

"Yes'm."

"And don't he knock them down?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because he's afraid to."

"Why?"

"They would knock him down so quick that he would never know what struck him."

"You don't tell me!"

"Indeed, and I do, and if he begins kicking around here like a wild man, take the advice of not your mother, but your nephew, and go for him."

"I believe I will," she said, with an animation that surprised me. "He has bullied me long enough."

"That is the way to talk."

Really I had not the saintest idea that my aunt would follow my advice.

I would just as lief thought that she would have tried to set fire to the house.

But you never know how to take these old ladies.

Would you believe it; when my uncle came in she kept her word.

She went for him at a lively rate.

He came in growling as usual.

"Hum," he said, as he flung his umbrella in one corner, "what is that horrid smell of cooking?"

She did not answer.

She sat bolt upright in her chair and hummed a psalm tune.

Not the slightest notice of his presence did she take.

He looked dumfounded at her conduct.

"I would like to know what you mean by not answering me?" he inquired.

She was mute.

Then my uncle got mad in earnest.

"I'll find some way of opening your mouth!" he blustered.

This not very courteous remark was all that my aunt wanted to set her a-going.

There was a small broom, such as ladies use to brush up their room with, standing in one corner.

She grabbed it.

"I'll teach you," she said, "to insult me. You have bullied me long enough, you great, big, overgrown ruffian. You would not dare to speak a word to a man, but you come home and vent your spite on me. Take that, you great big coward. Take that and feel how you relish it!"

As she spoke she brought her weapon down with full force on his back.

CHAPTER X.

NEVER did I behold such a surprised man as my uncle.

He looked pale as a ghost, and stood for a second as if inert.

He did not have the chance to do statue business long. My aunt gave him a second dose of the broom.

I was right when I told my aunt that my uncle was a big coward.

He could have easily twitched the broom from her feeble hands.

But no!

Instead he turned tail.

He fled for his life down-stairs.

My aunt pursued.

She got in several lively blows in the course of their downward journey.

They kept on until the kitchen floor was reached.

On the floor is a small closet where coal is kept.

The door was open.

In the closet for coal my uncle descried a haven of refuge.

He rushed inside of the closet.

Just in time to escape a blow which, if had taken effect, would have made his head ring for many a day.

It did not.

He was too quick for her.

He got the door shut just in time, and its vim was wasted on the panels.

He gave a triumphant laugh.

"Ah, my dear," he cackled, "you ain't quite as smart as you think you are."

"Aint I?" said she.

"No."

"Why?"

"You did not hit me after all, my dear."

"Well?"

"Do you know what you had better do?"

"What?"

"Go up-stairs and cool off."

"Well, it will be a long time before you, ruffian, get a chance to cool off."

"It will?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You've forgot one thing."

"What?"

"The door has a spring-lock."

So it had.

My uncle felt more broken up than ever.

A spring-lock.

And he on the wrong side of it!

Undeniably his wife had him at her mercy.

"Let me out," he bellowed.

She only laughed.

One of those sarcastic laughs which aggravates a man more than a blow.

"Not much," she said.

"You won't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You know the reason."

"What?"

"Because you are such a loving husband. I mean to teach you a lesson. Ta! ta!"

This cool reply started my uncle off again.

"I'll break down the closet door," threatened he.

"You will?" calmly remarked my aunt.

"Yes."

"I would not if I were you."

"You wouldn't?"

"No."

"Haven't I a right to break down my own closet door if I want to?"

"I suppose so, but if I were you I would not."

"Why?"

"You might break a limb in so doing. Adieu! I hope you will enjoy yourself."

Away she went with a merry laugh, assumed, of course. The heart of the poor prisoner in the closet sank.

He realized that his wife had downed him again.

All that he could do was to wait till he heard somebody go along the hall outside, and pound on the door for assistance.

It seemed, though, as if the lower part of the house was deserted.

He pounded on the door.

He called for help.

All futile for awhile.

Then he heard footsteps coming along the hall.

His heart beat with pleasure.

Now he would be saved.

Or at least released from the closet.

Nearer drew the footsteps.

He waited till they were opposite.

Then he pounded on the door to attract the attention of whoever it was that was passing outside.

He was successful.

The person halted.

"Is there any one calling?" a voice asked.

"Yes," the head of the household replied.

"Who is it?"

"Me."

She recognized his accents, for it was our servant-girl.

Our servant-girl is of Milesian extraction.

She is no dudine.

She is about six feet high, with red hair and hands, and she won't stand blusflng from any one around the house, especially its master.

She loves him as the King of Evil is said to love holy water.

You may ask me why my uncle, who considers himself the head of the household, does not bounce her?

The answer is easy.

She is an elegant cook, and she used to be in my aunt's family before the latter was married.

When that lady was led to the altar she followed their fortunes and assumed control of the kitchen.

My uncle is a great epicure in eating, and he knows he will never find her equal in cookery—for the price he pays her.

"And is it you?" asked she.

"Yes."

"And what are ye doing in there?"

"I was locked in?"

"Ye wur?"

"Yes."

"Who by?"

"Your mistress."

"Did she do it on purpose?"

"She did."

"And what did ye do to her, poor lady, that she should do a deed to you like that?"

"Nothing."

"I don't belave it."

"What do I care what you believe? Jane?"

"What is it?"

"Let me out."

"Let ye out?"

"Yes."

"Indade and I will not."

"Why?"

"If the misthress locked ye in there she did it for a good rayson, and ye can stay there, because ye are better there thin elsewhere."

"Oh, Jane!" he called, piteously, as he heard her prepare to depart.

"What?"

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Shure I'd do a convict a favor if it was in me power. What is it?"

"Won't you please go up to my wife's room and ask her to come down here?"

"Av coarse I will. But I'll tell ye wan thing."

"What?"

"If I was her. I wouldn't grant the rayquest. I wud lave ye here all noight."

But she kept her promise.

She went up-stairs and obeyed the mandate of my uncle. I was with my aunt when she knocked at the door.

"Come in," said my aunt.

She did.

"What is it?" asked my aunt.

"He wants you," she said.

"He?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Your husband."

"What does he want me for?"

"To let him out av the closet, I suppose, but if I wur yo I wud tache him a lesson."

"How?"

"I'd lave him down there all noight, and it wud only serve him roight if the rats wud ate him up."

"Don't talk that way," said my aunt. "He may have his faults, but he has a kindly heart."

"Yis. That moight all be, but many a man wid a koindlier heart thin him has been hung."

My aunt was well versed in the peculiarities of her faithful servant.

"Don't talk that way," said she. "Don't you know, to say the least, it is a very ungrateful speech to make about a man from whom you earn your living?"

Jane was not crushed yet.

"And if it was only himself, it is meself that would not earn me living here foive days. Ye well know that I only stay here wid ye on account av the way he thrates ye."

Then Jane, impulsive as all her race, burst into tears.

"I am sorry if I have said anything which moight have hurt yez feelings," she said, "but the boss is enough to provoke the temper of a saint, and he will get punished for the way he acts toward you, maybe not in this world, but in the next."

Artful Jane!

Wasn't she the conjurer for you!

Very well she knew that her loudly expressed sympathy for my aunt would meet its reward.

So it did.

Next day she was presented with a dress nearly new.

"I'll go down," said my aunt, "and let him out myself."

"Indade and ye won't," said Jane. "The oidea av ye lowering yesilf to that ixtint! But I tell ye what ye can do."

"What?"

"If ye are so bound in releasing him, sind Masther Eddie down to do the deed."

I jumped at the suggestion.

I saw a chance for some fun.

"I'll go!" I eagerly said.

CHAPTER XI.

Go I did.

My uncle heard my approach,

Hope revived in his heart once more.

He began a perfect fusillade of kicks and blows against the closet door.

"Hey there—hey there!" he shouted.

I hey'd there.

I paused in front of the closet.

"Anybody in there?" asked I, in the most innocent accents I could employ.

"Yes," came an answer in muffled tones from the closet.

"Who is it?"

"Me."

"Who's me?"

"Your uncle."

"Nonsense!"

"But it is."

"But how in the world did you get in there?"

"She done it."

"Who's she?"

"Your aunt. Won't I make her pay for her little bit of sunny business!"

"I would not."

"Why?"

"She says she is through with you."

"Through with me?"

"Yes."

"I don't know what she means."

"Why, it is easy enough to tumble to. She means to leave you and go to her brother Jim's."

"Get out!"

"It goes."

"But what does she want to go to her brother Jim's for?"

"Because she means to apply for a divorce."

I could hear my amiable kinsman groan in a stupefied sort of way.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated he, "what have I ever done that she should sue for a divorce?"

"She says she can prove that almost since the date of her marriage you have treated her with studied cruelty."

"Thunder and lightning! Ed?"

"Well?"

"You know that is an infernal lie!"

Purposely I hesitated before replying.

The great man in the closet grew impatient because I did not answer him at once.

"Have you lost your tongue?" he shouted.

"No," I said, "but, uncle—"

"What?"

"You know the rough way you have of talking to her?"

"It's only habit. She acts so silly at times that I can't help scolding her. I do not mean anything by it."

"But a referee would not believe that."

"Why wouldn't he?"

"Ever know a referee yet that in such a case was not on the side of the woman? There's more money in it."

Uncle John was forced to confess that such was the case.

"The big fools let themselves be carried away by spurious feelings of chivalry or gallantry, and give a verdict in her favor. But, Ed?"

"Well?"

"How long before you mean to let me out?"

"Right away."

I kept my word.

I opened the door.

Uncle John did not present a picture of cleanliness as he walked out of the closet.

He was besmeared with coal dust from head to foot.

"What do you think I had better do in this dilemma?" asked he.

"Go take a wash the first thing."

He thought the advice was good.

He went in the kitchen and laved himself.

When he got through he looked better.

More like a white man than he had previously.

"Now," he said, "I guess I will try to make up with the old lady."

"I would," I advised; "and do it as quickly as possible, or beware of Jim."

"My brother-in-law?"

"Yes."

"What has he got to do with it?"

"A good deal."

"How?"
 "Aunty hasn't any parents living, has she?"
 "No, they died long ago."
 "Well, Jim, as you know, is a regular sport."
 "Puts himself up for one, perhaps."
 "He's a good rower."
 "I never saw him row, and can't tell."
 "A fair shot."
 "I never heard of him bringing any game home."
 "But worst than all, that is for you, he is a superb boxer."
 "I don't care if he is a regular Sullivan."
 "But you will."
 "When?"
 "When he tackles you."
 "Tackles me?"
 "Yes."
 "I'd like to be told what business he has to tackle me?"
 "Aunty's father and mother both being deceased, he is the head of the family, is he not?"
 "I suppose so."
 "There is no supposing about it."
 "What do I care one way or the other about it?"
 "But you will. When he finds out how you treated your wife, do you know what he will do?"
 "What?"
 "He'll just come around here and pay you a social call to try and adjust family matters."
 "Well, he needn't do it. I don't want to see him."
 "And you'll wish that you never had seen him when he does call."
 "Why?"
 "As the supposable head of the family it is his duty to avenge his sister's wrongs."
 "But, blast it, she ain't got no wrongs. She's got a regular picnic."
 I delighted in teasing the old fellow.
 It did me good to aggravate him.
 "Can't tell what public opinion will decide. Jim, of course, will take aunty's story that she is a regular martyr, and he'll travel here with velocity."
 "He be hanged!"
 "Unfortunately he will refuse to be hanged, but he will be liable to hang you."
 "No, he won't."
 "Have it your own way."
 "But can't I explain things to him?"
 I laughed sarcastically.
 "Not much. He'll listen to nothing. He is as headstrong as a mule," I assured.
 "That is so."
 "And he would listen to explanations, like fun. Instead, he would sweep the sidewalk all up with you, that is if he happened to meet you on the sidewalk."
 "I don't doubt the young ruffian would if he got the chance, and glory in the deed. What is your advice?"
 "Go up and apologize to aunt at once before it is too late."
 He sulked worse than a bear with a sore head at the suggestion.
 But finally his good sense prevailed.

He saw that it was the only thing to be done, if the dove of Peace was to be desired to hover over the household.
 "I'll do it," he said, making a wry face, "but you can bet it will be the first and last time I humiliate myself before any woman."
 "It won't be humiliation."
 "It won't?"
 "No."
 "What then?"
 "Reparation."
 "Putting it in this light seemed to be a little balm to my uncle."
 "That's true," he said; "perhaps I *am* too hasty at times."
 "Of course you are. Now just you and aunty kiss and make up."
 At the door of his room he paused.
 Turning to me, he somewhat sheepishly said:
 "Don't you come in."
 "Why not?" I asked.
 "Because I don't want any one to see me make an old fool of myself knuckling down to Eliza."
 "All right."
 He shut the door lightly.
 At least he thought he did.
 But he was mistaken.
 He left it just a little bit ajar.
 I will own that I feel ashamed of myself when I make a confession.
 Curiosity is the curse of us all.
 I am not free from it.
 Rather am I cursed with it to a very large extent.
 Almost as bad as a woman.
 I committed a grievous breach of etiquette.
 I listened to the conversation of the happy, connubial couple.
 Likewise did I commit the crime of peeping through the key-hole.
 Uncle John's arrival was a complete surprise to my aunt. Poor woman!
 Already had she regretted her rebellion, and was trembling almost for fear of what its consequences would be.
 It was a wonder she did not burst out into tears and beg his pardon.
 However, she didn't.
 She sat bolt upright as a pile-driver, and looked as implacable as a Gorgon. (Gorgons, I believe, were mythological females who only had one eye, which was situated in the middle of their foreheads, and who, by common repute, were said to be holy terrors.)
 Uncle John nervously deposited himself on the edge of a chair.
 He looked a perfect emblem of despair.

CHAPTER XII.

EVIDENTLY he had expected his wife to burst out with some violent denunciation of him.
 He seemed disappointed that she did not.
 Five long minutes ensued.
 My aunt showed about as much signs of life as a dummy.
 At last my uncle made a desperate effort to break the frigidity.

"Hum!" he said, in a deep, bass voice. She no more noticed him than if he had been a thousand miles away.

"Hum!" he repeated.

No attention paid.

For the third time he "hummed" in a voice like the roar of a lion.

This time Mrs. John noticed it.

Unfavorably.

"Mr. Clutterbuck," she remarked, "is that you?"

"Yes," he replied.

"How dare you?"

"How dare I what?"

"Intrude on my privacy."

"Intrude on your privacy?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"This house is mine, ain't it?"

She spoke the truth.

It was her house, and she held the deed for it in her own name.

The old gentleman could not dispose of it at all without his wife's consent.

He felt more nervous than ever.

"Seems to me, Eliza," he remarked, wriggling about on his chair, "that you have a very peculiar fit on this afternoon."

"So I have."

"What ails you?"

"You'll find out to your sorrow."

"Eliza?"

"Well?"

"I fail to understand your language."

"You will find out soon enough. I have stood your brutality long enough, and do not mean to endure it any longer."

"My brutality?"

"Yes."

"Why, woman, I never raised a hand to you in my life."

"But there are other ways of being brutal."

"How?"

"Ever since we have been married you have done nothing but abuse me with your tongue."

"But I don't mean a tenth of what I say."

"That makes no difference. You should have thought of that before. My mind is made up."

"To what?"

"Have you leave the house."

Had a bomb exploded beneath his chair my uncle could not have evinced more surprise.

He sprang to his feet with an expression of consternation on his face.

"Eliza," he bawled, "you are crazy!"

"Thanks for the compliment," she icily said, "but if I am, there is a method in my madness. I have borne with you long enough, and I do not mean to bear with you any longer."

The eminent merchant tried to make a rally.

"Hoity-toity!" he said, with a little of his old bluster; "fine words from my lady! But suppose that I refuse to leave, I'd like to see who would put me out?"

My aunt smiled serenely.

"My brother James."

This is what they call in the vernacular of the prize-ring "a facer."

He loved his brother-in-law as dearly as brother-in-laws generally love each other.

That is to say, he almost hated him, and the two barely exchanged civilities.

My uncle got red in the face.

"Well," he blustered, something like his old self, "I would just like to see him or any other man living put me out of my own house. They'll have a pretty tough time doing it, let me tell you. I'll call in a policeman and settle the hash of that rowdy brother."

My aunt laughed.

"You're talking big, ain't you?" asked she.

"I mean what I say."

"Well, what you say is rubbish."

"Why?"

"In the first place you haven't any house, and you know it. It belongs to me."

This was "facer" number two.

"Yes," continued my aunt, "instead of Jimmy being put out when the policeman came, it would be *you* who would make an involuntary exit. I would tell him you were raising a disturbance, and you would be put out with surprising suddenness."

At this "facer" number three my uncle gave in.

He sank like a crushed tragedian into his chair again.

Gradually he was realizing that his wife was not such a fool as he had always considered her to be.

"Eliza?" he said, in as tender tones as he could assume.

"Eliza?"

"I don't want to listen to you," she said, but with a milder voice.

"Oh, but you must."

"Must I?"

"Yes."

"I would make an apology to you."

"It is about time."

"I will own that I have not treated you right in many ways."

At this confession, which must have galled my uncle's pride awfully to make, my aunt relented.

"John," said she, "let this be a lesson to you. Remember that he who ruleth his temper is greater than he who ruleth a city."

"Which I suppose is true," responded Uncle John, "although it is awful tough work sometimes. And say, Eliza?"

"Well?"

"We'll all go to the theater to-morrow night."

By this time I felt that it was time to appear on the scene of the happy reconciliation.

I knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" asked he.

"Me," I answered.

"Ed?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"Can't I come in?"

"Well, I suppose so, if you behave yourself."

I entered.

I saw at the first glance that all was well, and that a reconciliation had occurred.

"Bless you, my children," I remarked somewhat irreverently. "This is as it should be, uncle."

"Well, you saucy young jackanapes," he said, "you mind your own business."

I suppose that I had ought to, but I could not resist the temptation of teasing my respected relative.

I struck and sang in my own sweet thrills:

"There is Beauty all around
When there's Love at home,
Peace and Plenty do abide
When there's Love at home."

He did not appreciate my carol.

"You impudent young scoundrel, I've a good mind to break your neck!"

"Don't," I requested, "put yourself to any such trouble. Besides, uncle, you might get excited over the neck-breaking operation, and have one of those spells of yours, and fall down. Don't you remember that day last summer?"

"What day?"

"The day the policeman brought you home, and all the neighbors said:

"Poor old Clutterbuck!"
"What a pity! he's drunk again!"
"Full as a goat!"
"Can't hardly walk!"
"See him stagger!"
"He's a disgrace to his wife!"
"The sot!"
"How his poor wife must feel!"
"Why did he not wait, and not come home till it was after dark?"

"Why, he seems proud of his shame."

"Don't seem to care a rap about appearances!"

"Him! No. What does he care for appearances? They say he has been lushing it like that for fifty years."

These reminiscences did not seem to please my uncle.

He scowled at me.

"That will do," he said. "You are always lugging up that infernal mishap. I suppose you told everybody you knew that I was drunk?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it was a wonder, and you ought to be rewarded."

"Of course I ought."

"And I'll do it."

"How?"

"We are all going to some show to-morrow night, and I'll take you along."

"Good! Uncle?"

"Well?"

"Your shanty is only equaled by your good looks."

"Taffy!" he replied, courteously.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE combination of "Murderers and Murderesses of the World" and myself got along very finely until one unfortunate day, having canvassed New York and Brooklyn pretty well, I went to New Jersey.

There I met with my first scrape.

At Jersey City I sold several copies, selling by sample, C. O. D., and at Newark I did well, too.

It remained for me to get into a scrape in a little town, which I will Skinville, which was a very proper title for it.

At least in my case.

For I got skinned there.

By the law, too.

They talk about "Jersey justice."

Bah!

They don't know what they are talking about.

I do.

I call it Jersey injustice.

Experience is a good teacher, and I got my experience of "Jersey justice" right there in Skinville.

I entered the bar-room of the only hotel the settlement boasted.

The bar-room was no gilded palace of debauchery, but simply a rough-and-ready sort of a place common to most small country towns.

The bar was a plain oak one, and it was not set off by an array of fine cut glasses.

Not much.

Its only ornament was a bunch of withered lilacs stuck in a broken pitcher. They had been there a week probably.

The bar-keeper lolled with his elbows on the bar, talking to a fat man with a dirty red beard.

I went up to the bar and braced the couple.

Taking off my hat, I wiped the perspiration from my brow.

I knew the way to reach the hearts of the rustic Jerseyites.

It is very simple.

All you have got to do is to treat.

Never, though, expect them to treat in return. Such a proceeding would be little less than a miracle, and if by accident he did while drunk he would be apt to kill himself in an agony of remorse when he sobered up.

"Gentlemen," I remarked, "awful hot day."

"Terrible," said the bar-keeper.

"Awful," said the red-bearded stranger.

"It is a wonder people can live in the city," observed the barkeeper.

"Good weather for business?"

"Well, yes," admitted the barkeeper. "At least it ought to be."

"Ain't it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Ever hear the old rhyme about beer?"

"No. Let me hear it."

"It's short and sweet, and, better yet, it is true. Here goes. No bouquets, please:

"If you ain't got no money

You can't buy no beer;

And if you ain't got no money

You can't buy no beer here."

That's true the world over. Folks ain't got no money for beer."

"You're right," I acquiesced. "In these hard times we all look to our dollars and dimes. And speaking about beer, will you join me in a glass of that delicious beverage or anything else you want?"

Would they?

Wouldn't they?

They accepted my offer with alacrity.

"Whisky straight, and give me the right bottle, Bill," requested the red-bearded stranger. "The last time you tried to work that old rot-gut stuff on me, which was a very mean trick to play on a friend, for if I had swallowed it it would have ruined the coating of my stomach."

"That is all right. It would take nothing less than liquid dynamite to ruin the coating of *your* stomach, sheriff."

Here was a discovery.

The barkeeper's friend was a sheriff, and I knew what a big man the sheriff is in a country town, and I concluded it politic to ring in with him. (*En passant* he rung me in.)

The barkeeper mixed himself a delectable concoction which he called a "tansy sour," and was very anxious to have me try one.

I declined.

With thanks.

I felt that I was too wicked to leave this world just then, and I had a strong foreboding that such would be the result should I swallow that "tansy sour."

I modestly took a pony of beer.

It was brought, and it proved warm and stale.

I only took a few sips of it, and that was sufficient for me.

I felt that if I swallowed the whole beer I would vomit.

The sheriff noticed that I did not get away with my beer.

He asked me the reason.

I told him frankly.

"That's so," he said, "warm beer ain't very palatable, especially in hot weather, and the ice all ran out yesterday. Why don't you try some straight whisky?"

"Much obliged, but it is very seldom that I touch any kind of 'hard stuff.'"

The sheriff looked sad for a moment.

"Young fellow," he said, "I wish that I could say as much. But I can't."

"Why not?"

"I'm too liberal and whole-souled. Rum costs me thousands of dollars every year just in treating."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes. I spend thousands of dollars every year in treating the gang."

"But don't you think it is a foolish habit?"

"I don't think so; I know so."

"Then why do you keep it up?"

"Can't help it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's all my own fault."

"How?"

"I'm too good-natured."

"In what way?"

"Treating. I'm imposed upon."

"Who by?"

"All of the boys. They know my failing, and they get me up in front of the bar and keep pestering me to treat until just to get rid of them, I do so. There is a couple of dollars gone in a wink for drinks."

Here the sheriff stopped to expectorate a flood of tobacco juice over the floor.

"But don't they ever treat back?"

"Them!"

"Yes."

"You must be crazy, my young friend. Them ducks treat! Half of them don't see a dollar once a year! But I'm sheriff, you see."

"Yes."

"And they think that I carry a boodle as big as a New York alderman's."

Then he turned his attention to my personality.

"Young seller," he solemnly said.

"Yes."

"I'm sheriff of this town."

"They could not have a better."

"Hum. You're a stranger to this town."

"I am."

"Hum. It is my duty as the sheriff to ask you where you hail from?"

"New York."

"Hum. And what is your name?"

"Montague Fortescue."

"What?"

"Montague Fortescue."

"A very suspicious name."

"I do not think so."

"You do not?"

"No. In my opinion it is a dandy."

"In my opinion it is an assumed one."

I could not imagine what he was driving at.

I asked him point blank.

"Sheriff," said I, "I do not really understand the meaning of all this catechism of me."

He fixed what I suppose he would call his "eagle eye" upon me.

"Young man," he said, in a stern voice—a voice which I suppose he imagined would thrill my guilty conscience with terror, "I consider you a suspicious character."

This was a pleasant announcement.

Coming from a sheriff.

And a Jersey sheriff at that.

But after the first shock of the announcement I thought that I could well afford to laugh it off.

"Nonsense," I said, "there is nothing of the suspicious character about me. I have a legitimate business."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"I sincerely hope so, but you will have to prove it, or I will have to arrest you."

Of course I could prove it.

Most certainly.

Canvassing is a legitimate business.

"Sheriff," I said, "I can do so in a minute."

CHAPTER XIV.

"I AM glad to hear it," he said, although he did not look a bit glad.

My sample copy of my work I carried done up in a nice leather case, which I had had made especially for it.

The case reposed just where I had put it when I entered the saloon. It was on a small table, nobody having disturbed it.

I picked it up.

I returned with it to the suspicious official.

I placed it on the bar.

My next move was to open it by sliding the clamps which held its edges together apart.

The bag flew open.

Its contents was revealed; *viz*: one harmless book.

The sheriff looked very much surprised.

Well might he be.

No doubt he fully anticipated that the public exposure of the bag's contents would reveal a whole kit of burglars' tools.

But he was left.

Most decidedly.

He took off his hat and scratched his head.

No burglars' tools.

Not even a cheap jimmy.

It was tough luck.

Especially to the sheriff, who, junkhead as he was, thought himself a born detective instead of being what he came within an ace of being, that is a born fool.

After considerable cogitation a brilliant idea occurred to him.

"Young man," asked he, "where did you steal that book?"

That was a little too much.

To be accused of stealing my own book.

"Look at here!" I hotly said, "I don't care whether you are sheriff or not, I do not allow any one to call me a thief."

He weakened.

"But where did you get the book?"

"Want to buy it?"

"What do you mean?"

"It is for sale."

"I don't understand yet."

"Then you must be very dull of comprehension."

"Why?"

"I am a canvasser, and this is the book I am canvassing for."

"Let me look at it?"

"Certainly. Just put your name down for three copies and I will let you have them cheap."

He picked up the book.

The moment he had it in his clutch, his whole manner changed.

"Ah, ha!" he chuckled. "I have you now!"

The tables were turned.

It was my turn to be bewildered.

"You have me now?" I echoed, mechanically.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"You are in the strong grasp of the law as represented

by me, and the law don't mean to let you escape so easy."

"But what have I done?"

He held the book aloft in triumph.

"Are you aware," asked he, "that there is a fine of ten dollars imposed on every one caught peddling wares of any description in this town?"

"No."

"Well, there is."

"But I did not know it."

"I can't help that. Ignorance of the law excuses no one. You will have to come along with me to the Squire's, and I warn you not to try to escape on the way, for I am armed and I would be justified by the laws of New Jersey in shooting you right down. Say?"

"Well?"

"If you promise you won't try to run away I won't put 'em on."

"Put what on?"

"The nippers."

"I promise," I said, indignantly. "I suppose nothing would please you better than to march me through the streets with manacles on."

"Well, one can't be too careful," he excused. "Didn't I arrest a boss-thief, a chap just about your build, and looking as meek as a lamb? He took his arrest easy, and laughed, and insisted on treating all hands before I lugged him away to jail. But I never got him to jail."

"You didn't?" I growled.

"No!" savagely said he.

"How was that?"

"On the way he up and hits me with a piece of lead-pipe which he had hid up his sleeve, and knocks me silly."

"Then he did not go to jail, after all?"

"No, darn his eyes, and I haven't been able to find him since."

The narration made me feel a sincere regard for the horse-thief.

If I should meet him I will be only too happy to open a bottle of wine in his honor.

The mansion of the squire was not far off.

It was a two-story cottage, and the squire himself sat on the porch.

The squire was an agreeable old party.

He must have been about ninety years old, and he looked more like some old mummy temporarily electrified into life than anything else.

He was reading a paper, which he laid down at our approach.

"Hello, sheriff!" he said, "what's that you've got—a prisoner?"

"Mornin', squire," obsequiously answered the sheriff.

"Yes, it is a prisoner."

"What has he been doing?"

"Violating one of the town ordinances."

"Indeed! That is bad. Which one?"

"Peddling without a license."

"A very heinous offense and one that I am bound to put a stop to at all hazards. Peddlers who roam through the country without licenses I always consider have some sinister motive. On pretense of peddling they visit a house

in the daytime and find out all about it, so that they can lay their plans how to rob it at night."

The sheriff nodded his head approvingly.

"It takes you, squire," he said, "to figger things out."

The old idiot on the bench was pleased at this piece of flattery.

"I ain't been on the bench for nigh come thirty years," he said, "without making a close study of the criminal classes."

I flared up at this.

"I do not consider myself a member of the criminal classes at all," said I, "and I want you to understand it."

The faded black skull-cap which the local Solon wore nearly fell from his head.

"Wh—what!" he gasped, "this to me, me, Justice Shallow? Young man?"

"Well?" I said.

"Do you know what I have a great mind to do?"

"What?"

"Commit you for contempt of court."

"I do not think I have said anything disrespectful."

"You don't?"

"No."

The justice turned to the sheriff.

"Sheriff?" he said.

"Yes, your honor," answered the sheriff.

"Do not you think the prisoner at the bar has been guilty of contempt of court?"

"Most assuredly, your honor."

By this time it was plain to me that his nibbs, the sheriff, was a creature of the justice—a veritable lick-spittle.

With a great deal of pomposity the justice told me to follow him to the court room.

The court-room was a great snap of an apartment.

It was a little dingy room having a bare floor, unplastered walls, and a window covered, without exaggeration, with an inch of dirt.

The furniture was truly regal.

It consisted of a battered desk and a high stool for the justice, and a couple of plain pine benches for the prisoner and witnesses.

The justice, with an air of magisterial severity, mounted the high stool.

The sheriff and myself occupied a bench.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the justice, as with great ostentation he mounted his high stool, and opening the lid of his desk, drew forth a big inkstand, a pen and a dingy volume in which were kept the proceedings of the court, "what is your name?"

"Montague Fortescue," I answered.

"Age?"

"Twenty-three."

"Married?"

"No."

"Where born?"

"New York."

"Occupation?"

"At present canvasser."

"Religion?"

"I am a Sun Worshiper."

The justice looked aghast.

"What did you say your religion was?"

"A Sun Worshiper."

"What sort of a sect is that?"

"Oh, it is a very select sect. We only meet once a year. Sometimes we cluster on the banks of the River Ganges, then again a second year may find us down on our knees on one of Greenland's icy mountains worshiping the sun. We always bend the knee to him on the Fourth of July."

The justice swallowed this alarming piece of taffy without a choke.

He looked shocked.

"Then you are an idolator?" he gasped.

"Some folks might call me so."

"Wuss and wuss. The idea of idolators having the effrontery to peddle books in a Christian country. Young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"The court finds you guilty, and its sentence is that you pay a fine of ten dollars and stand committed until the fine is paid."

CHAPTER XV.

HERE was a nice prospect for a lone young man out in the wilds of the Red Mud State with no friends and no ten dollars. All of the dross I had around my person was about three of Uncle Sam's emerald-colored promises to pay of the one denomination.

And if I did not pony up I would have to go to a dirty Jersey jail and languish for a night in durance vile until I could communicate with my relatives.

Luckily a sudden idea entered my head.

"Justice," said I, "the sheriff forgot to tell you what I was peddling."

"That is so, Davidson," said Justice Shallow, "and it is very careless indeed on your part."

The sheriff looked somewhat confused.

I sincerely believe he meant to keep the book himself.

"It—it is a book, Your Honor," said he.

"A book, hey?" said the irascible justice. "Why didn't you tell me so before?"

"B-b-because you did not ask me," stammered the sheriff.

"It makes no difference whether I asked you or not. The proper place for the custody of that book is in the hands of the court, not yours."

With a crestfallen air Sheriff Davidson produced the book.

He gave it to the justice.

The magistrate took it from its case.

Putting on his steel-rimmed spectacles he read the title.

His face grew red with rage.

He slammed the volume down on the table.

"Abominable!" he exclaimed. "The idea of selling such vile works. Young man."

"Yes, sir."

"I have a good mind to fine you twenty dollars more on that account."

"Justice?"

"What is it?"

"I am very careful to whom I sell these books. Not for a moment do you suppose that I would place them in the

hands of the guileless or of the vicious classes. Nay—nay, such a deed would I scorn—I would consider myself a villain."

"And I think you are," growled the sheriff, who had noticed that my little speech had made an obvious effect on the justice.

"Davidson?" said he.

"Well?"

"Shut up, or leave the room."

Davidson subsided.

It was evident that the cranky magistrate was no respecter of persons.

I seized the advantage I had gained.

You can wager I improved the opportunity.

"I only sell to lawyers and magistrates," I fictioned.

"What a whopper!" breathed the sheriff.

He breathed it in what he thought was an inaudible whisper, and that he would not be heard by the justice.

He was mistaken.

The justice heard him.

He had the keenest ears of any old gentleman I ever came across.

"Stand up, Jim Davidson!" he ordered.

Alarmed at the mandatory tones of the peppery old fellow, he stood up just like some cowed school-boy.

"Jim Davidson!" impressively said he, "you think because you are sheriff of this county that you are a big man."

"I don't," sullenly said the sheriff.

"Don't you contradict me, for I will send you up for contempt of court, Jim Davidson."

"What?"

"Say, 'what, your honor.' Don't you know how to address a magistrate sitting on the bench?"

"What, your honor?"

"That sounds more like it, Jim Davidson."

"What, your honor?"

"That is very good again. I tell you, Jim Davidson, the people of this county are a set of fools."

"What for?"

"Electing you sheriff. You won't be elected again."

Mr. Davidson plucked up a little courage.

"You just bet I will."

"Well, I'll just bet you won't."

"Why not?"

"Ain't you got a pretty record? Now, tell me, who did you ever arrest?"

"Didn't I arrest a camp of tramps who were up in Everett's Woods?"

The withered old justice laughed.

It was one of the most ghastly laughs that I ever heard.

It sounded like the merriment of some ghoul.

"Ha, ha!" he wheezed, "that was a big arrest, was it not? Two of the tramps were women and the other a blind man! You will be elected! Oh, yes! Oh, certainly!"

"But I will be."

"Elected to stay home. You bet that you don't get my support. Say?"

"Well?"

"Why don't you find that horse-thief that knocked you

down? They said he was about as big as a shrimp. I suppose that if you did find him you would run away from him."

This was the last straw which broke the traditional camel's back.

He grabbed his hat and cane.

He stalked out like a bear with an inflamed cranium.

The justice grew merry at his departure.

"I've sent him off mad enough to tear my wig off," he said, "and I am glad of it. He's a fool, and all of his folks are. There was never any of the tribe any good except good for nothing."

"I did not care, however, to stay there and hear a *dia-tribe* against the tribe of Davidsons (pun patented)."

"Justice?" I said.

"What's it now? Going to pay me that ten dollars?"

"I would if I could, but, unluckily, I can't."

"Why not?"

"I have not got it."

"Very unlucky" for you. I always thought that book peddlers carried hundreds of dollars in their apparel."

"You are much mistaken. At times we are lucky to carry a hundred of cents."

"Serves you right. Go in some other business. Be an honest blacksmith or a respectable grave-digger. Even be a circus clown, but do—do abandon canvassing. Why don't you become a tin peddler? I knew a boy about your age who started out as a tin peddler, with a basket on his arm. How much do you suppose he is worth now?"

"A million dollars."

"He ain't worth a cent, and owes yet for the basket."

CHAPTER XVI.

My first impulse, when I heard this venerable chestnut, was to faint.

But I restrained the swoon.

I did a much wiser thing.

I burst into an affected fit of laughter, just as if the justice had uttered one of the richest *bon mots* in the world.

"Good!" I cried—"excellent!"

The justice appeared pleased at my appreciation of his story.

He actually gave vent to some sepulchral sounds of merriment himself.

"Have a cigar, justice?" asked I.

He would.

On that you can wager.

He took it, bit it about half in two, country fashion, and lit it.

"How do you like it?" I asked, after he had taken a few puffs.

"Good," he answered. "The canvassing business must pay. How much is that weed worth?"

"Twenty cents about."

He looked alarmed.

"Seems to me, young man," he said, "that is flying in the face of Providence to pay that price for a cigar when so many poor people can't buy bread."

"You don't suppose I bought it, do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I didn't."

"Where did you get it?"

"Did you ever hear of Dr. Muldoon of Jersey City Heights?"

"No. Who is he?"

"One of the greatest specialists of the age."

"Is he?"

"Yes."

"What is his speciality?"

"The extirpation of cancers."

At my answer the worthy magistrate seemed a little puzzled.

"What be that big word you used just now?" interrogated he.

"Extirpation?"

"Yes. What does it mean?"

"It means doing away with. You see the surgeon just puts the patient under the influence of chloroform, takes his knife, makes an incision all around the cancer, and he has it out in a jiffy."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"But don't it hurt?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Ain't the patient under the influence of the chloroform administered, and therefore oblivious to pain?"

"That's so."

"Well, Dr. Muldoon not only gave me the cigar you're smoking, but he did more."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"He bought one of my books. He said it was a work that no gentleman's library should be without. Justice?"

"Well?"

"You have a library?"

"Oh, yes."

Sure enough he had.

It consisted of a couple of venerable law-books and a last year's calendar.

"Well, my book will be a most important addition to your library, and you as a dispenser of justice you should buy it. It is a duty you owe the community."

"I don't see how."

"Had not you ought to familiarize yourself with the histories of famous criminals. Some day it may lead to your making some important arrests."

This logic appeared to impress my magisterial friend.

"That's true," he said; "how much are the books?"

"Five dollars," I said, boldly. There is nothing like cheek.

"Ain't that pretty steep?"

"What! for a work of art like that? Look at the binding."

He did so.

The binding was one of the cheapest, flashiest kind and just suited to capture the affections of a countryman, and the cover was ornamented by a gilt picture of a gentleman dangling from the gallows.

"Now," I went on, "mark the fineness of the paper and

the excellence of the steel engravings. Now would you like to have that book?"

"Of course I would, but I ain't fool enough to pay five dollars for it. Five dollars! Great Gosh! Why, it is as much as I take in sometimes in a week for fines."

"Justice," I said, "I'll make you a proposition."

"You will?" he said.

"Yes."

"Of what kind?"

"It's a business one."

"Let me know it. I'm business all of the while."

"You fined me ten dollars, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Now I'll give you two copies of this work and call it square."

He bit at the offer in a minute.

His face assumed a benignant air.

"Young man," said he, "I believe you mean well after all."

"No one ever meant better."

"I think so myself. But I have only one volume here."

"Yes."

"And how am I sure that you won't forget to send me the second book? You might forget it when you reach the city."

I assumed an air of indignation.

I pulled out my watch.

You may not believe me, but I have a watch.

It is a good watch, too, and keeps excellent time.

It ought to.

I got it free with a ten-dollar suit of clothes over in the Bowery.

It is a stop watch, too.

That is to say, it stops all of the time.

"Justice," I said, in as sorrowful tones as I could assume, "I am pained."

"At what?" he asked.

"Your suspicions."

"Waal, we don't know who to trust these days."

As he finished speaking I acted.

I planked my watch down on his desk.

"There!" said I, in tragic tones.

The justice must have thought that it was some infernal machine.

He nearly fell from his stool.

"Take it away," he begged, with chattering teeth.

"Take what away?" I asked, in surprise.

"That."

"What?"

"The thing you just put down on my desk."

"Why?"

"It might go off!"

"Nonsense! That ain't a dynamite bomb."

"What is it?"

"A watch."

"But what do you want to put it on my desk for?"

"As security that I will send you the second copy."

This made the suspicious old fellow ashamed of himself. He actually excused himself for his suspicions as to my integrity.

Then he closed court.

"Young man," he said, "you are discharged."

I thanked him and turned to leave.

He called me back.

"Wait a minute," he requested.

I did.

There was an old-fashioned cupboard in an adjoining room.

To this he proceeded.

I could hear for a moment the clink of glassware.

Then he returned with a wine glass.

It was filled with some mysterious fluid.

"Taste it, young man," he said.

"What is it?" asked I.

"Elderberry wine. I tell you what it is fine."

To oblige him I did so.

I tasted it and have been soured on elderberry wine ever since.

It may be a fine drink, but it does not suit my palate. I prefer vinegar.

However, I thanked him for his hospitality, and then departed.

And mighty thankful was I to depart.

At the depot I met the sheriff.

That worthy had recovered from his temporary discomfiture.

He was as fresh as ever.

"Nice justice we've got," he said.

"The old gentleman seems to be rather eccentric," I answered.

"Eccentric! Why, he is as crazy as a loon. Know what I mean to do?"

"What?"

"Get up a petition to have him sent to the lunatic asylum," and with that he swaggered off.

That was my last canvassing trip.

I found other and more congenial work shortly afterward and embraced it.

As for my aunt and uncle, I am pleased to say that up to the present time all is harmonious with them.

[THE END.]

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